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# NEW LEFT REVIEW

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Mike Davis *The Democrats Return*

Göran Therborn *Mapping Social Theory*

Tom Nairn *1707 and After*

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*The Virtues of Robespierre*

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# NEW LEFT REVIEW 43



SECOND SERIES

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## ARTICLES

MIKE DAVIS

*1 11 30*  
The Democrats Return

5

ROBERT BRENNER

Structure vs Conjuncture

33

GÖRAN THERBORN

After Dialectics

63

## BOOK REVIEWS

TOM NAIRN

Union on the Rocks?

117

DUNCAN McCARGO

Bhumibol's Hollow Crown

135

CHRISTOPHER  
PRENDERGAST

Virtues of Robespierre

147

*New Left Review*

# PROGRAMME NOTES

## MIKE DAVIS: The Democrats after November

With anti-war sentiment growing—if still passive—in the US, how will Democrats use their recapture of Congress? Mike Davis analyses likely outcomes on the questions—Iraq, corruption, economic insecurity—that confront a Party leadership hooked on corporate dollars, and myopically gazing towards 2008.

## ROBERT BRENNER: Structure versus Conjuncture

Robert Brenner reads the US mid-term results against deeper structural shifts in the American polity. The rise of the Republican right seen in the context of the long downturn and dismantling of the liberal compact: from New Deal and Great Society to the capitalist offensive under Reagan, Clinton and Bush.

KP 2665

## GÖRAN THERBORN: After Dialectics

Göran Therborn offers a panoramic survey of left social theory since the fall of Communism. The vicissitudes of modernity as contested temporal narrative, and the divergent thematic paths—religion, Utopia, class, sexuality, networks, world-systems—that are emerging in the new landscape.



## BOOK REVIEWS

TOM NAIRN on Michael Fry, *The Union*. Revisiting the circumstances of the UK's founding pact, amid non-celebrations of the 1707 Treaty of Union and a groundswell of support for Scottish independence.

DUNCAN MCCARGO on Paul Handley, *The King Never Smiles*. Taboo-breaking biography of the world's longest-serving monarch, Thailand's Bhumibol Adulyadej. Is the throne's mystique, carefully reconsolidated in the 20th century, now threatened by the lottery of primogeniture?

CHRISTOPHER PRENDERGAST on Ruth Scurr, *Fatal Purity*. The life, career and death of Robespierre, permeated by tensions between ends and means, terror and virtue; and the polemical furies that have clouded his legacy.

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*see also NLR 2, 10, 22 and 35*

MIKE DAVIS

## THE DEMOCRATS AFTER NOVEMBER

WAS THE NOVEMBER 2006 midterm election an epic political massacre or just a routine midterm brawl? In the week after the Democratic victory, partisan spin-meisters offered opinions as contradictory as those of the protagonists in *Rashomon*, Kurosawa's famously relativistic account of rape and murder. On the liberal side, Bob Herbert rejoiced in his *New York Times* column that the 'fear-induced anomaly' of the 'George W. Bush era' had 'all but breathed its last', while Paul Waldman (*Baltimore Sun*) announced 'a big step in the nation's march to the left', and George Lakoff (*CommonDreams.org*) celebrated a victory for 'progressive values' and 'factually accurate, values-based framing' (whatever that may mean).<sup>1</sup> On the conservative side, the *National Review's* Lawrence Kudlow refused to concede even the obvious bloodstains on the steps of Congress: 'Look at Blue Dog conservative Democratic victories and look at Northeast liberal GOP defeats. The changeover in the House may well be a conservative victory, not a liberal one.' William Safire, although disgusted that the 'loser left' had finally won an election, dismissed the result as an 'average midterm loss'.<sup>2</sup>

### I. VICTORY AND ITS WOES

But Safire doth spin too much. Although the Democratic victory in 2006 was not quite the deluge that the Republicans led by Newt Gingrich, Dick

Armey and Tom DeLay unleashed in 1994 (see Table 1), it was anything but an 'average' result. Despite the comparatively low electoral salience of the economy, the opposition's classic midterm issue, the Democrats managed to exactly reverse the majority in the House (the worst massacre of Republicans since 1974) and reclaim the Senate by one seat. Indeed, the Senate gained its first self-declared 'socialist', Bernie Sanders of Vermont, an independent who caucuses with the Democrats.

Democrats, for the first time ever, did not lose a single incumbent or open House seat. Independent voters (26 per cent of the electorate) swung to the Democrats by an almost two-to-one ratio—the biggest margin ever measured among independents since the first exit polls in 1976.<sup>3</sup> With the strongest female leadership in American history, they outpolled Republicans among women 55 to 45 per cent in House races; but more surprisingly, they also managed to reduce the GOP's famous lead among white men (a staggering 63 per cent in the 1994 House contests) to 53 per cent.<sup>4</sup> According to veteran pollster Stanley Greenberg, one out of five Bush voters moved into the blue column; but none so dramatically as the electoral market segment of 'privileged men' (college-educated and affluent) where the GOP's 2004 margin of 14 per cent was transformed into a slim Democratic majority. Although the slippage among the GOP hardcore—evangelicals and white rural and exurban voters—was slight, the party of the moral majority declined 6 per cent among devout Catholics, while angry Latinos, recoiling from the GOP grass roots' embrace of vigilantes and border walls, murdered Republicans in several otherwise close contests in the West.<sup>5</sup>

In state races, the Democrats demonstrated even more traction. On election eve, the GOP boasted a majority of governorships (28 to 22) and a slight lead in control of state legislative chambers (49 to 47, with

<sup>1</sup> Bob Herbert, 'Ms. Speaker and Other Trends', *New York Times*, 9 November 2006; Paul Waldman, 'A Big Step in Nation's March to Left', *Baltimore Sun*, 12 November 2006; and George Lakoff, 'Building on the Progressive Victory', *CommonDreams.org*, 14 December 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Lawrence Kudlow, 'Reach Out to the Blue Dogs', *kudlowsmoneypolitics.blogspot.com*, 8 November 2006; and William Safire, 'After the Thumpin'', *New York Times*, 9 November 2006.

<sup>3</sup> William Schneider, 'Swing Time', *National Journal*, 11 November 2006.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Edsall, 'White-Guy Rebellion', *National Journal*, 11 November 2006.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Borosage, James Carville and Stanley Greenberg, *The Meltdown Election: Report on the 2006 Post-Election Surveys*, Democracy Corps, Washington DC, 15 November 2006, pp. 2–3.

2 tied).<sup>6</sup> Contrasted to overwhelming Democratic dominance in state legislatures before 1994, when Republicans controlled only 8 states, this rough parity—according to John Hood, the president of a North Carolina conservative think-tank—has been ‘one of the most significant and lasting products of the Republican Revolution’. But it is a legacy now lost as the Democrats have exactly reversed the partisan ratio of governors (leaving Republican executives in only 3 of the 10 most populous states), while winning control of 8 more state chambers (now 56 Democrat versus 41 Republican, with 1 tied). ‘What’s worse for the GOP’, Hood points out, is that the majority parties in state legislatures will control congressional redistricting in the wake of the rapidly approaching 2010 Census. ‘If Democrats retain their current edge, the US House will get a lot more blue.’<sup>7</sup>

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TABLE I: 1994 versus 2006

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	Republican gains 1994	Democrat gains 2006
House	54	31
Senate	8	6
Governorships	10	6
State legislatures	20	4
State representatives	472	c.320

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Source: Storey and Moore, ‘Democrats’, and Hood, ‘GOP’.

Regionally, Republican candidates were decimated in the GOP’s original heartland, New England—including notoriously conservative New Hampshire, where Democrats took over the legislature for the first time

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<sup>6</sup> There are 98 partisan chambers in 50 states, but Nebraska, thanks to its great Progressive, George Norris, has had a unicameral, non-partisan legislature since 1937.

<sup>7</sup> John Hood, ‘GOP Car Wreck’, *National Review*, 4 December 2006. Democrats doubled the number of states (from 8 to 16) where they control both the legislature and the governor’s mansion. See analysis in Tim Storey and Nicole Moore, ‘Democrats Deliver a Power Punch’, *State Legislatures*, December 2006.

since the Civil War—and the Mid-Atlantic states, leading one prominent conservative to lament that ‘the Northeast is on its way to being lost forever to the GOP’.<sup>8</sup> Democrats also made surprising gains in the Midwest and the ‘red’ interior West, especially in Colorado where hi-tech money leveraged a growing Latino vote.<sup>9</sup> Even in the South, the Democrats managed to arrest their long-term decline and claw back 19 seats in state legislatures. (Despite the prevalent myth of a solidly Republican South, the Democrats still retain a 54 per cent majority in Dixie state houses.)<sup>10</sup>

In Kansas—Tom Frank’s icon state of voter false consciousness<sup>11</sup>—Democrat Nancy Boyda defeated incumbent Jim Ryun (the former Olympic track star) in a congressional district that Bush had carried by 20 percentage points two years earlier. Popular Democratic Governor Kathleen Sebelius was easily re-elected, while the other top state offices, the lieutenant and attorney generalships, were won by former Republicans running as Democrats—a startling reverse in the trend of political conversion. The state’s foremost cultural conservative, the fanatically anti-abortion attorney general Phil Kline, was pulverized: receiving barely one-third of the vote in the usually Republican exurbs of Kansas City (Johnson County).<sup>12</sup> Nothing seemed particularly ‘wrong’ with Kansas in the fall of 2006.

Such results convincingly refute the legend of invincibility that had been woven around Karl Rove’s signature strategy of intensive base mobilization (usually stimulated by hysteria over some imperilled Christian value) and massive negative advertising (usually perpetuating some outright lie or slander against the opposition). According to Stanley

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<sup>8</sup> Jonathan Martin, ‘Damn Yankees’, *National Review*, 18 December 2006.

<sup>9</sup> For a hysterical view of ‘how liberal millionaires are buying Colorado’s politics’, see John Miller, ‘The Color Purple’, *National Review*, 4 December 2006.

<sup>10</sup> Storey and Moore, ‘Democrats’

<sup>11</sup> Frank’s brilliantly written and highly influential 2004 book, *What’s the Matter with Kansas?*, portrays a white working class that has surrendered any rational calculation of its economic interests to hopeless, manipulated cultural rage. Like many other progressives, he calls for the Democrats to counter Rovian cultural populism with their own economic populism. My 2005 critique of Frank, ‘What’s Wrong with America?’ (prepared for a UCLA debate) appears in *In Praise of Barbarians: essays against empire*, Chicago 2007.

<sup>12</sup> Peter Slevin, ‘Trounced at Polls, Kansas GOP Is Still Plagued by Infighting’, *Washington Post*, 30 December 2006. Slevin argues that the culture wars—evolution and abortion particularly—have deeply, perhaps irreparably split the Kansas GOP.

Greenberg, 'the Republican Party has ended up with the most negative image in memory, lower than Watergate'. But the Democratic pollster (writing in collaboration with Robert Borosage and James Carville) was adamant that Republican losses are not necessarily Democratic gains. 'The Democratic Party also ended up being viewed more negatively during this election than in 2004 . . . Democrats have only modest advantages—and are chosen by fewer than 50 per cent on such key attributes as being "on your side", "future-oriented" and "for families".'<sup>13</sup>

Thomas Edsall agrees that 'Democratic triumphs are fragile' and warns that they are 'based far more on widespread dissatisfaction with the war in Iraq than on the fundamental partisan and ideological shift that was apparent in 1980 and 1994 Republican breakthroughs'.<sup>14</sup> Partisan registration remains closer to parity (38 per cent Democrat versus 37 per cent Republican) than at any time since the late nineteenth century, and control of the House is arbitrated by swings of just a few percentage points: the reason the Republicans have been so keen to undertake controversial midterm redistrictings and gerrymanders to buttress their power.<sup>15</sup>

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TABLE 2: *Percentage of popular vote in House elections*

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	<i>Republican</i>	<i>Democrat</i>
2000	48	48
2002	51	46
2004	50	47
2006	46	52

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Source. Charlie Cook, 'Rebalancing Act', *National Journal*, 2 December 2006.

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<sup>13</sup> Borosage, Carville and Greenberg, *Meltdown Election*. Republican pollster Frank Luntz agrees with Greenberg: 'So much of it [the election] was a statement of disappointment in Republican leadership rather than an embrace of the Democratic alternative. The election was a referendum on the national GOP.' Storey and Moore, 'Democrats'.

<sup>14</sup> Edsall, 'White-Guy Rebellion'.

<sup>15</sup> The Senate, in which Wyoming with less than 500,000 people has the same representation as California with nearly 35 million, provides the Republicans (dominant in the rural, more thinly populated states) with a notorious advantage.

The victors, moreover, share no consensus about the direction of their party. In contrast to 1994, when the GOP was rapturously united around the programme of its congressional 'revolution', Democratic ideologues at the end of 2006 were fundamentally split. While progressives like Ezra Klein (*American Prospect*) fretted that Blue Dogs and DLC-ers were ready 'to lock liberals out of the halls of power', Christopher Hayes (*Nation*) applauded the 'new Democratic populism', and Michael Tomasky (*American Prospect* editor) argued that the party was cleverly moving to the centre and to the left simultaneously ('the party managed to sustain this left-centre coalition and render the distinctions between the two groups less important').<sup>16</sup> Hillary Clinton and her chorus of sycophantic voices boasted of the miracle of the 'vital, dynamic centre', while other Democrats pessimistically agreed with Safire's acid prediction that the party was headed towards civil war.

In any event, the Democrats led by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid have two years to consolidate their enhanced electoral support and effectively arm Hillary Clinton for a very nasty brawl with either John McCain or Rudy Giuliani in 2008.<sup>17</sup> (Neither of the two mystery phenomena—Republican Mitt Romney and Democrat Barack Obama—are likely to survive the brutal scrutiny of the presidential primaries, although they may be recycled as vice-presidential timber.)<sup>18</sup> The 110th Congress will

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<sup>16</sup> Ezra Klein, 'Spinned Right', *American Prospect* online, 8 November 2006; Christopher Hayes, 'The New Democratic Populism', *Nation*, 4 December 2006; and Michael Tomasky, 'Dems put the "big tent" back together', *Los Angeles Times*, 12 November 2006.

<sup>17</sup> The backlash of independent voters against Bush pumped wind into the sails of both McCain and Giuliani, perceived as the only Republicans who can win that segment of the electorate; but even more dramatically, it increased the value of 'Terminator' futures. California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, whose political fortunes collapsed in 2005 after a disastrous stint as a conservative Republican, has returned from the dead in a new, hugely popular incarnation as a big-spending stealth-Democrat. His backers are currently canvassing the possibility of a constitutional amendment that would allow the foreign-born actor to run for president in 2012.

<sup>18</sup> An Opinion Research/CNN poll of whom voters did *not* want to be their party's 2008 candidate found Mitt Romney at 50 per cent among Republicans (just behind retired Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist) and Barack Obama at 38 per cent among Democrats (behind Al Gore and the luckless John Kerry). See 'Poll Track', *National Journal*, 2 December 2006.



give the Democrats extraordinary opportunities to repeal the reactionary agendas established in 1994 by the 'Republican Revolution' and in 2001–02 by the 'War on Terrorism'. But the Democrats will be torn between two categorical imperatives: on the one hand, to sink as many Republicans as possible with George Bush's ship of state; and, on the other hand, to reclaim the mystic 'centre' and the support of corporate lobbyists. If the recent past is any guide, a seriously populist and ideologically combative Democratic politics is totally incompatible with the Clintonite project of making the Democrats the representatives *par excellence* of the knowledge economy and corporate globalization.

More specifically, the new Democratic majority must test its ambiguous promises of crusading populism *and* inclusive centrism against the recalcitrant realities of the four mega-issues that will inevitably dominate the new Congress: (1) the Iraq fiasco and the War on Terrorism; (2) the legacy of Republican congressional corruption and corporate fraud; (3) urgent, unmet social needs (including the reconstruction of the Gulf Coast) in the context of the huge Bush deficits; and (4) the growing unrest over the social costs of economic globalization. In each case, the hopeful expectations of last November's voters for real changes in Washington are likely to be betrayed by the higher imperatives of electing Hillary and assuaging big business.

## II. SMALLER OR BIGGER WAR?

Unlike the 2004 presidential election and the controversy over the importance of 'values voters', there was nothing equivocal about the key issue that mobilized a majority of voters in November 2006. With the housing-bubble economy still puttering along (although a real-estate-induced recession may not be far away), and with Mexican- and gay-bashing failing to ignite significant national backlashes, the defining issue was the looming defeat of the US intervention in Iraq.

Six out of ten voters told pollsters that they were upset at Bush's management of the war—the spiralling carnage in Baghdad and the paralysis in the White House—and had voted accordingly. Editorial page punditry, likewise, was united with exit-poll surveys in agreeing that Iraq was the Archimedean lever that had shifted independent voters so massively

TABLE 3: *Voters' priorities*

	<i>Democrats</i>	%	<i>Independents</i>	%	<i>Republicans</i>	%
1.	War in Iraq	61	War in Iraq	52	War in Iraq	38
2.	Economy	19	Economy	18	Fuel prices	20
3.	Health care & fuel prices	18	Health care & fuel prices	14	Immigration	19
4.	Energy crisis	10	Energy crisis	13	Terrorism	18
5.	Disaster relief	10	Immigration	9	National Security	12

Voters were asked what the President's 'top priorities' should be. Source: Gallup Poll 28–31 August 2006, cited in Jeffrey Jones, 'Iraq War Dominates as Americans' Top Priority for Government', Gallup Organization, Princeton, 8 September 2006

toward the Democrats.<sup>19</sup> Conservative ideologues and business lobbyists, meanwhile, were appalled to see their domestic agendas upstaged by the Frankenstein monster of Iraq.<sup>20</sup> Even that 'wholly-owned subsidiary of the Republican Party' (as columnist Rosa Brooks has called it), the military electorate, has begun to bolt the stable: *Military Times* polls show the percentage of soldiers identifying as Republicans declining from 60 per cent in 2004 to 46 per cent in late 2006. Only slightly more than one-third of GIs currently approve of Bush's handling of the war.<sup>21</sup>

After twelve years of arrogant majority rule in Congress, the GOP has seemingly foundered on the contradictions of the new imperialism.

<sup>19</sup> William Schneider was fascinated by an almost exact numerical correlation in every region between disapproval of the war and disapproval of the president: 'Swing Time'. Charlie Cook, another well-known psephologist, gave Iraq credit for 70 per cent of the national shift from red to blue. Charlie Cook, 'The War's Wave', *National Journal*, 11 November 2006.

<sup>20</sup> See Bara Vaida and Neil Munro, 'Reversal of Fortunes', *National Journal*, 11 November 2006.

<sup>21</sup> As Brooks emphasizes, the aggressive Republicanization of the professional military is a relatively recent phenomenon (since Reagan and the Second Cold War) that has been reinforced by GOP policies that have shifted military bases and officer-training programmes to more conservative Sunbelt states. Rosa Brooks, 'Weaning the military from the GOP', *Los Angeles Times*, 5 January 2007.

Or has it? The irony of the anti-war vote, of course, was that it elected Democrats who are under no obligation to actually end the barbarous US occupation. Writing shortly after the election, Tom Hayden praised the citizen groups in Chicago and elsewhere who had fought to make the election a plebiscite on an increasingly unpopular war, but warned presciently that 'neither party is prepared to accept that the war is a lost cause' and that the Iraq Study Group report would offer the Democratic leadership common ground with congressional Republicans 'to eliminate "immediate withdrawal" as an option'.<sup>22</sup>

Despite majority public belief that Iraq is a 'bad war' and the troops should come home, the current Democratic strategy is to snipe from the sidelines at Bush's ruinous policies while avoiding any decisive steps to actually end the occupation. Indeed, from the standpoint of cold political calculus, the Democrats have no more interest in helping Bush extract himself from the morass of Iraq than Bush has had in actually capturing or killing Osama bin Laden. Accordingly, as the *Los Angeles Times* recently reported, 'Pelosi and the Democrats plan no dramatic steps to influence the course of the war'.<sup>23</sup> Democratic National Committee chair Howard Dean, who once claimed to be the very incarnation of the anti-war movement, now cautions that the most the public can expect from the new majority is 'some restraint on the president'.<sup>24</sup> Likewise Pelosi has renounced from the outset the Democrats' one actual power over White House war policy: 'We will have oversight. We will not cut off funding'.<sup>25</sup>

The real Democratic opposition to the war (John Murtha's highly publicized defection aside) has come from the ranks of the Black Caucus, whose members—including John Lewis, Charles Rangel and Barbara Lee—are also the chief instigators of the recently organized Out of Iraq

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<sup>22</sup> Tom Hayden, 'Election Interpretation', handout to his class at Pitzer College, 9 November 2006.

<sup>23</sup> Noam Levey, 'Democracy To-Do List is Modest at Outset', *Los Angeles Times*, 2 January 2007.

<sup>24</sup> William Schneider, 'Warring Sects', *National Journal*, 18 November 2006.

<sup>25</sup> Levey, 'Democracy To-Do List'. Pelosi echoes the position of chief Democratic Leadership Council ideologue, Will Marshall, that 'those mindful of history [e.g., Vietnam] will shy away from trying to take over Iraqi policy by, for instance, cutting off funding for the war.' James Kitfield, 'Next Steps in Iraq', *National Journal*, 11 November 2006.

Caucus, chaired by Los Angeles's fiery Maxine Waters. The substantial overlap between the anti-war caucus (which also includes ten or so Latino representatives led by New York's outspoken José Serrano) and the House membership most strongly committed to urban social programmes is expressive of a fundamental political trend that the media has all but ignored: the widespread consciousness in communities of colour that the interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan (costing more than \$2 billion per week) are stealing critical resources from human needs in poorer inner cities and older suburbs, as well as putting immigrant communities under the shadow of disloyalty.

This new equation between urban needs, immigrant civil rights and anti-imperialism could become a potent counter-agenda in American politics if it were reinforced by grass-roots activism and consistent protest. But here is the rub. Although the Out of Iraq Caucus has grown to 74 members (more than one-fifth of Democratic House membership) in the wake of the November vote, its clout is considerably diminished by the absence of a national anti-war movement, as well as by the failure of the major progressive trade unions such as SEIU, HERE-UNITE and the AFT to make withdrawal a political priority.

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TABLE 4: *Democrat Congress Members affiliated to ideological caucuses*

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<i>On the Left</i>		<i>On the Right</i>	
Progressive Caucus	70	New Democrat Coalition	60
Black Caucus	43	Blue Dog Coalition	44
Out of Iraq Caucus	74	Democrats for Life	32

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Some memberships overlap Source: 'Democrats to Watch', *National Journal*, 18 November 2006, pp. 23–6.

Indeed the electoral landscape in November was shaped by the central paradox of soaring anti-war sentiment without a visible anti-war movement. In contrast to 1968 and 1972—or even, for that matter, 1916 and 1938—voter opposition to intervention overseas was not buttressed

by an organized peace movement capable of holding politicians' feet to the fire or linking opposition to the war to a deeper critique of foreign policy (in this case, the War on Terrorism). The broad, spontaneous anti-war movement of winter 2003—whose grass-roots energy filled the void of Democratic opposition to Bush's invasion—was first absorbed by the Dean campaign in spring 2004 and then politically dissolved into the Kerry candidacy. The 2004 Democratic Convention, which should have been a forum for wide-ranging attacks on Republican foreign and domestic policies, was transformed into an obnoxious patriotic celebration of John Kerry as the Brahmin Rambo.

Although many activists hoped that an autonomous peace movement would re-emerge from the ruins of the Kerry campaign, there have been only a few regional pockets of sustained protest. One of Howard Dean's principal assignments as national Democratic chair (and the major reason for his selection) has been to keep anti-war forces immobilized within a diffuse and hypocritical Anybody But Bush coalition. By making Bush and his political parents Cheney and Rumsfeld the paramount issues, Democratic sophistry has avoided a real debate on Iraq. Leading Democrats may bash the President for the chaos in Baghdad, but none of them has offered a critique of American responsibility for the larger anarchy that is rapidly engulfing a vast arc of countries from Pakistan to Sudan. There has been no debate on the Bush administration's green light for the Israeli massacre of Lebanese civilians or, more recently, on the CIA's sinister role in instigating the Ethiopian invasion of Somalia and the US air strikes there. The Israeli right, meanwhile, knows that Hillary Clinton will be as intransigently supportive of its policies in Gaza and on the West Bank as any Texas fundamentalist eagerly awaiting Armageddon.

Indeed the Democratic leadership—the Black Caucus and a few notable progressives aside—has exploited domestic resentment against Bush policies in Iraq to *consolidate*, not debunk, the underlying Washington consensus about the War on Terrorism. Whereas a national anti-war movement would presumably have linked the apocalypse in Iraq with looming catastrophe in Afghanistan and a new regional war in the Horn of Africa, the Democratic platform, in contrast, reaffirmed commitment to the war against Islamists as part of a larger programme of *expanding*, not reducing, global counter-insurgency. 'Bring the troops home now' was not a Democratic plank, but doubling the size of the Special Forces

'to destroy terrorist networks' and increasing spending on homeland anti-terrorism are centrepieces of the Democrats' 'New Direction for America' (a collection of sound bites and slogans that offers a pale shadow to Gingrich's robust 1994 'Contract with America').<sup>26</sup>

The Democratic leadership likewise has deliberately avoided a debate on the constitutional implications of the Patriot Act; not a single prominent Democrat has proposed the straightforward rollback of the totalitarian powers claimed by the presidency since 9/11. Indeed Hillary Clinton has signalled that she favours imprisonment without trial and even the use of torture in certain circumstances. Speaker Pelosi, meanwhile, has emphasized that the chief Democratic goals in the 110th Congress will be, first, to pick the uncontroversial, low-hanging fruit of mainstream reform (minimum wage, prescriptions, student loans and so on), then move quickly to pass an 'innovation agenda' for hi-tech industries. Foreign policy debates in the House—thanks to the hawkish counterweight of more than 100 New Democrats and Blue Dogs—will not reach beyond the bipartisan assumptions of the Baker–Hamilton Plan or whatever new, coercive strategy for Palestinian national self-liquidation is proposed by Condoleezza Rice.

What then has the anti-war vote actually won? At the end of the day, public disillusionment with the messianic politics of the neo-Conservatives has paved the way for a 'Realist' restoration under the aegis of the Baker–Hamilton plan that reconciles the foreign-policy establishments of Bush Senior and Clinton. The bloodbath in Iraq has opened every sarcophagus on the Potomac, disgorging a palsied army of ancient secretaries of state and national security advisors (Scowcroft, Eagleburger, Brzezinski and, of course, the chief mummy, Kissinger himself) eager to lecture Congress on 'rational' approaches to imposing American will on the rest of the world. Hillary Clinton, of course, is the Queen of the Realists (except when it conflicts with Israeli interests), and the new Democratic majority in the House is unlikely to stray very far from the already manifest script of her 2008 campaign. In future debates with Rudy Giuliani or John McCain (who has recently appointed himself

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<sup>26</sup> When the *National Journal* asked Ike Skelton, the new chair of the Armed Services Committee, about his priorities, he responded: 'Are they getting jammers? Are they getting body armour? The infantry and the Special Forces need to be larger, better trained, and have better equipment.' 'Democrats to Watch'.

saviour of 'victory' in Iraq), Hillary is poised to be a hard-muscled GI Jane, parrying every macho gesture with even tougher stances on al-Qaeda, Iran, Palestine and Cuba.

The silver lining, if it exists, is that the Democrats in Congress, with the Black Caucus and its allies lobbying for withdrawal, are more likely to be swayed by public anger as insurgency and civil war in Iraq continue to exhaust the resources of the Occupation. In a desperate gambit to appease Sunnis and defend a zone of control in Baghdad, the Bush administration is currently weighing an all-out assault ('surge' is its military precondition) on the slum militias of Muqtada al-Sadr. A new war with the Mahdi Army (hugely enlarged and better trained since its first battles with American troops in 2004) would open another Pandora's box, risking unsustainable American casualties and an explosive response from the entire Shi'ite world. (Inevitable US air strikes on Sadr City would produce grim scenes reminiscent of the Israeli bombardment of southern Beirut.)

If Condoleezza Rice and Robert Gates sanction this ultimate escalation, they have a good chance of bringing some macho Democrats aboard (although they will almost certainly lose some leading Republicans). Senate leader Harry Reid has already demonstrated his epic confusion by endorsing and then quickly retracting support for the proposed 'surge' of 35,000 more US troops into Baghdad. In the Senate, the hawkish Joe Lieberman, who was re-elected as an independent after his defeat in the Democratic primary, will be a powerful swing vote in favour of escalation. Pelosi, at the time of writing, is considering resistance to new monies for the 'surge', but will not tamper with funding for existing troop levels.

What stance Pelosi and Reid ultimately assume, and how hard they actually push for the 'phased withdrawal' proposed in their six-plank November programme, will be largely determined by the resurgence—or not—of the anti-war movement. Last November's voters certainly had fewer illusions than their candidates about the hopelessness of the situation (according to exit polls, 'only about one in five voters say they think that either the President or the Democrats have a clear plan for Iraq'),<sup>27</sup> and public opinion may again find volcanic alternatives to an impotent

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<sup>27</sup> Pew Research Center data cited in William Schneider, 'The Price of Patience', *National Journal*, 2 December 2006.

Congress. Indeed, only mass protest, unfettered from the Realpolitik of Howard Dean and MoveOn.org, can shift the balance of power in Congress towards a decisive debate on withdrawal.

### III. THE LIMITS OF INQUIRY

One of the most savoury moments of the November vote was the election of Nick Lampson to Tom DeLay's old seat in the 22nd District of Texas. Lampson—a school teacher who was formerly the Democratic congressman from Galveston—had been one of the principal victims of DeLay's infamous 2003 redistricting of Texas: an unprecedented mid-decade gerrymander that was made possible by the massive and illegally laundered corporate donations that the House Majority Leader had deployed to elect a Republican majority in the Texas Legislature the year before. Thanks to the courage of a local grand jury and Travis County DA Ronnie Earle, DeLay was indicted for perjury in September 2005, and soon afterward, under federal investigation for his close ties to corrupt lobbyist Jack Abramoff, he was forced to resign his majority leadership, then his congressional seat.

DeLay, of course, was the Robespierre of the 1994 'Republican Revolution', perhaps the most ruthless crusader for one-party government in US history. As one of the co-founders of the so-called 'K Street Project',<sup>28</sup> along with Rick Santorum and Grover Norquist, he was notorious for coercing huge campaign contributions from corporate lobbyists (as well as promises to hire only Republicans) in exchange for allowing them to directly write GOP legislation. As Majority Leader (or 'Hammer' as he was known to Republicans as well as Democrats), he imposed unprecedented ideological discipline on the GOP (even defying a White House attempt to give a small tax break to low-income families) while slashing at every vestige of bipartisanship and collegial civility. In partnership with the infamous Abramoff, he was also the advocate of the sleaziest causes in the Capitol,

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<sup>28</sup> 'K Street'—after the office address of many corporate lobbyists—is the metonym for the revolving door that punctually turns former members of Congress (especially committee chairs) and their aides into highly-paid lobbyists for pharmaceutical companies, oil giants, real-estate brokers, arms dealers and foreign dictators. Although civics textbooks have yet to acknowledge its enormous importance, 'K Street' is truly the fourth, 'financial' branch of national government in the United States.



ranging from support for indentured labour in the sweatshop paradise of the Northern Marianas (a US territory without the protection of US labour laws) to under-the-table favours for a giant Russian corporation that in turn kicked back money to DeLay-related causes.<sup>29</sup>

After more than a decade of being roadkill in the wake of DeLay's sleaze-financed campaign juggernaut (with Karl Rove as hit-and-run driver), the Democrats now have the opportunity to begin to roll back the Republican Revolution—which is to say, to break up the corrupt flows of money and power personified by DeLay and the K Street Project. Congress, of course, has always been about 'pay to play' and the lubrication of politics by lobbyists, but never before 1994 had the Republicans employed such stark coercion to impose themselves as the obligatory rather than simply the natural party of business. (In part, this was a reaction to Democratic successes in attracting support from bicoastal, new-economy sectors like entertainment, media, software, bio-tech and gaming.)

The exhilarating promise of the November victory is that a cadre of veteran liberal Democrats—Charles Rangel (Ways and Means), Barney Frank (Financial Services), Henry Waxman (Government Reform), David Obey (Appropriations), Ike Skelton (Armed Forces), and John Rockefeller IV (Senate Intelligence Committee)—will use their hard-won committee chairmanships to mount sweeping inquisitions of the Himalayan corruption and collusion of the DeLay years. With subpoena power finally in the hands of the opposition, the interlocking special interests that dominate the Bush administration will face the comprehensive exposure and accounting that they managed to elude in the aftermath of the Enron scandal. Indeed, as the skeletons come tumbling out of the Republican closet, and the public realizes how vast the extent of graft and fraud in the occupation of Iraq, the non-reconstruction of New Orleans, 'homeland security' boondoggles like the phony Bioshield programme, and the subsidization of the insurance, pharmaceutical and oil industries—then voters will overwhelmingly endorse a new regime of government oversight, renewed environmental and health-and-safety regulation, and serious campaign finance reform.

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<sup>29</sup> See Lou Dubose and Jan Reid, *The Hammer: Tom DeLay, God, Money, and the Rise of the Republican Congress*, New York 2004.

This is the real opportunity to which the Democrats could rise in theory, but there is little chance that their leadership will actually allow congressional probes to follow money and corruption all the way upstream. Progressive hopes that Congress might return to the heroic days of Thurman Arnold's anti-trust investigations of the late 1930s, or the Watergate Committee's exposés of Republican law-breaking in the 1970s, are pipe dreams in face of Pelosi's insistence that Democratic watchdogs be tightly leashed, in the interests of building 'centrism'. She has already extracted humiliating loyalty oaths from the two senior Black Democrats most likely to rock the bipartisan boat: forcing John Conyers (chair of the Judiciary Committee) to recant his advocacy of impeachment ('the country does not want or need any more paralysed partisan government', he said recently) and making Charles Rangel, who has hammered Dick Cheney like no one else in Congress, sing a chorus or two of the company song ('I have to take a leadership view', he promised).<sup>30</sup> Even more diabolically, she has put Henry Waxman ('White House Enemy No. 1') in charge of ensuring (in the words of analyst Brian Friel) that congressional oversight does not 'open Democrats up to charges of obstructionism and extremism in the next campaign cycle'.<sup>31</sup>

In the absence of relentless pressure from labour and environmental groups, the Democrats are unlikely to discomfort powerful business interests that they would otherwise delight in wooing away from the Republicans. Certainly there will be some reckoning with Halliburton and contract fraud in Iraq, and perhaps the perjury trial of Scooter Libby (Cheney's indicted chief of staff) will be spiced with new revelations from Rockefeller and his Senate Intelligence Committee about the administration's lies and fabricated evidence on the road to Baghdad; but a widening circle of exposure will meet increasing resistance, not simply from Republicans fighting for their lives, but from Democrats trying to protect their renewed ties to the very corporate groups at the core of corruption and scandal. The opportunity to expose and reform will be counter-balanced at each step by the temptation to make deals and collect campaign contributions. As the *Economist* cynically but accurately put it, 'the new house chieftains do not see themselves as

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<sup>30</sup> Richard Cohen, David Baumann and Kirk Victor, 'Going Blue', *National Journal*, 11 November 2006, p. 16; and 'Democrats to Watch'.

<sup>31</sup> Brian Friel, 'Junkyard Dogs, on a Leash', *National Journal*, 11 November 2006.

revolutionaries. Their goal, after all, is not to enact a specific agenda, but to prepare the ground for the presidential election of 2008.<sup>32</sup>

Because corporate lobbyists are scared of the subpoena power wielded by Rangel and Waxman (however constrained by Pelosi), they will happily seek refuge in Democratic campaign committees. The fusion between Corporate America and the Republican Party appears less permanent and unassailable than it did a year ago and, as *BusinessWeek* predicted shortly after the election, 'companies will be rushing to stock up on lobbyists with Democratic credentials'.<sup>33</sup> The Democratic leadership, for its part, is brazenly cruising for cash. The next election cycle will be the most expensive in history, and Hillary Clinton is unlikely to relish congressional hearings into the crimes of the pharmaceutical, oil and military-construction industries that could unleash massive corporate retaliation against her in 2008. From a strategic perspective, it makes far more sense for the Democrats to concentrate congressional exposés on a handful of Administration villains, while quietly rebuilding parity of representation on K Street, where many of the winged monkeys are reputedly rejoicing at their recent liberation from DeLay, the wicked witch of Texas.

As *BusinessWeek* reassured nervous readers, any tendency toward populist excess in the new Congress would be counteracted by the millionaires, corporate lawyers and hi-tech entrepreneurs in the ranks of Democracy itself, especially the fervently pro-business New Democrat Coalition (the House arm of the Democratic Leadership Council) chaired by Rep. Ellen Tauscher of California. 'In a narrowly divided Democratic House, Tauscher's band of about 40 economic moderates would wield extraordinary power to influence tax, trade and budget policy.' Moreover, CEOs worried about possible indictment or evil corporations fearful of losing their lucrative federal contracts could always appeal to K Street's new wonder, George Crawford, who as Nancy Pelosi's former chief of staff has positioned himself to be Washington's chief deal-maker. ('In recent months,' reveals *BusinessWeek*, 'he has added Exxon Mobil Corp. and Amgen Inc. to his client roster.')

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<sup>32</sup> 'Old dogs; few tricks', *Economist*, 11 November 2006.

<sup>33</sup> Richard Dunham and Eamon Javers, 'The Politics of Change', *BusinessWeek*, 20 November 2006.

<sup>34</sup> Dunham and Javers, 'Politics of Change'.

Beyond the uncontroversial agenda of the '100 hours', few of the promised reforms that have attracted progressive voters to the Democrats are likely to make any headway against the coming hurricane of corporate lobbying and political fundraising organized by Crawford and other Democratic insiders. Energy policy, for example, has been one of the party's highest-profile issues, and Senator Barbara Boxer (new chair of the Environment and Public Works Committee) has rallied a broad coalition of environmentalists around tough emissions and fuel economy standards for automobiles. But as journalist Richard Simon recently reported in the *Los Angeles Times*, the Detroit automakers and Texas oil men are surprisingly unworried. 'We're confident that there are plenty of Democrats who know and understand us', a leader of the National Petrochemical and Refiners Association told him.<sup>35</sup>

The 'understanding Democrats' in the 110th Congress will include senators from energy-exporting states, such as Mary Landrieu (Louisiana) and Jeff Bingaman (New Mexico), as well as the powerful chair of the House Energy Committee, John Dingell (Michigan), who will fight to defend every last molecule of carbon dioxide emitted by a Ford Explorer or Chevy Suburban. Nancy Pelosi may take away some of the oil industry's more outrageous tax breaks, but Barbara Boxer will never take away rich Americans' SUVs or reduce their dependence on foreign oil. No matter how many millions of people may be terrified by global warming's 'inconvenient truth', there will always be Democrats to help filibuster any cap on greenhouse emissions or vote to preserve the oil industry's special entitlements.

#### IV. DEFICITS AND DOG POUNDS

In contrast to most European parliamentary systems, the American party system is only partially 'nationalized', and regional and local agendas preserve exceptional salience in the operation of Congress. The 2006 election is a spectacular case in point: whether or not the electorate actually shifted left, congressional clout—in one of the most dramatic geographical power-shifts in memory—moved back to the Blue coasts. Texas, Florida, Virginia and Georgia (whose suburbs were the strategic pivots of the 1994 Republican revolution) are out, and California and

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<sup>35</sup> Richard Simon, 'Green laws no slam-dunk in new Congress', *Los Angeles Times*, 18 December 2006.

New York (the pariahs of the age of Bush) are in. Or, to be more precise, Democrats representing the golden triangle of Wall Street, Hollywood and Silicon Valley now rule Congress.

Although California and New York (together with Massachusetts and Washington) hegemonize the knowledge economy and the US export of technologies, entertainment and financial services, they have become cash cows for regionally redistributive Republican policies since 1994. California is perhaps the extreme case. For fifty years, from Lend-Lease until the fall of the Berlin Wall, California's aerospace and electronics industries had been irrigated by an aqueduct of defence dollars; since 1990 at the latest, fiscal subsidies have switched direction and California now exports its federal taxes to heavily Republican states. Whereas California once received \$1.15 in federal expenditure for every dollar it paid in federal taxes, it now gets back only 79 cents. (The inequities are worse than depicted in Table 5, since California and New York are also the largest ports of entry for new immigrants and finance services that should be federal mandates.) Partly as a result of this shortfall, the

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TABLE 5: *Ratio of federal spending to taxes*

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<i>Red States</i>		<i>Blue States</i>	
Texas	1.00	California	0.79
Florida	0.98	New York	0.80
Virginia	1.59	Illinois	0.72
Georgia	0.96	Massachusetts	0.79
Arizona	1.23	Connecticut	0.67
Alabama	1.68	Minnesota	0.69
N. Carolina	1.08	Wisconsin	0.83
S. Carolina	1.36	Michigan	0.86
Kentucky	1.51	Oregon	0.99
Alaska	1.90	Washington	0.91

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Source: 'State Blaming Washington for Budget Woes', *Los Angeles Times*, 15 February 2005

world's premier science-based regional economy is supported by scandalously decayed physical, social and educational (at least, primary and secondary school) infrastructures.

But the Democrats will have to fight themselves, and not just Republicans, if they want to reverse the relative decline of federal expenditure, especially in the ageing cities of the Bluest states. While the new Congressional leadership, especially Pelosi and Clinton, have individually lobbied with great ferocity for their own districts' and states' needs, they have collectively tied the party's hands with a cargo-cultish commitment to deficit reduction and fiscal frugality. Although Iraq and political corruption were the most important issues amongst voters, that ancient Republican battle cry—'fiscal responsibility'—was the programmatic centrepiece of the Democrats' 'New Direction for America'.

Despite claims in the *Nation* and elsewhere that the Democrats are now channelling their 'inner populist', the party remains completely in thrall to 'Rubinomics'—the fervent emphasis on budgetary discipline rather than social spending that characterized the reign of former Goldman Sachs CEO Robert Rubin as Clinton's Secretary of the Treasury. In practice, this translates not simply into a Democratic reluctance to undertake new spending, but also a refusal to debate the rollback of any of Bush's \$1 trillion in tax cuts for the affluent. 'Tax and spend, tax and spend, tax and spend', Senator Kent Conrad (chair of the Budget Committee) told the *New York Times*, 'we're not going there'.<sup>36</sup> The president can give away the Treasury to the super-rich and run up colossal debts as he invades the world, but the Democrats are now sworn to a path of anti-Keynesian rectitude that would have made Calvin Coolidge blush.

Indeed Congress's most 'rabid budget-balancers' (this is the official description on their website) are the Blue Dogs, a caucus of conservative Democrats organized in 1995 in jealous emulation of Gingrich's Republicans. Hailing mainly from rapidly growing smaller cities and exurbs such as Merced, Tallahassee and Hot Springs, the Blue Dogs cultivate a downhome guns-and-bibles image in contrast to the cappuccino-drinking New Democrats (who tend to represent wealthier suburbs in Connecticut and California). Although they share the

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<sup>36</sup> Edmund Andrews, 'The Democrats' Cautious Tiptoe Around the President's Tax Cuts', *New York Times*, 4 January 2007.

hawkish politics of the DLC New Dems, they are less friendly to hedge funds and free-trade agreements. The real fire in the belly of the Blue Dogs is their demagogic opposition to state welfarism and, especially, federal aid to Black and Latino-majority big cities. With 44 members in their expanded 'dog pound' and plentiful allies on the Republican side, the Blue Dogs vow to cap spending in the next Congress, while gathering votes for a constitutional amendment to require an annually balanced federal budget.<sup>37</sup> One of their chief allies, South Carolina's John Spratt, will be chair of the House Budget Committee and, with Pelosi's blessing, the Party's 'chief enforcer' of budgetary austerity.<sup>38</sup>

Terrified of the perceived electoral and financial repercussions of attempting to reform the current tax system, and with the Blue Dogs barking at their heels, the leadership prefers to let Republican deficits and tax cuts dictate Democratic policy. Karl Rove proposes to do precisely that and, in the New Year, Bush invited the Democrats to join him in balancing the budget, 'a goal that would tie the hands of the Democrats', leaving them 'little or no room to manoeuvre their priorities through Congress'.<sup>39</sup>

## V. NEW ORLEANS VERSUS SILICON VALLEY

The Democratic leadership's public preference for balanced budgets over human needs is thus partly a reflection of the balance of power within the party, where the Blue Dogs (either alone or in combination with the New Dems) now claim *de facto* veto power over new legislation. It was presumably this pressure from conservative white Democrats that led congressional election strategists under the command of Illinois representative Rahm Emanuel to deliberately delete any mention of New Orleans from 2006 campaign advertising.<sup>40</sup>

The fate of New Orleans, of course, is one of the great moral watersheds in modern American history, but most Democrats shamelessly refused

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<sup>37</sup> Blue Dog Coalition, '12-Point Reform Plan for Curing Our Nation's Addiction to Deficit Spending', at [www.bluedogdemocrat.org](http://www.bluedogdemocrat.org).

<sup>38</sup> 'Democrats to Watch'.

<sup>39</sup> Joel Havemann, 'Bush wants budget balanced by 2012', *Los Angeles Times*, 4 January 2007.

<sup>40</sup> 'It's as if this year, Katrina was the subliminal issue.' Michael Tisserand, 'The Katrina Factor', *Nation*, 1 January 2007.

to make federal responses to Hurricane Katrina or the subsequent ethnic cleansing of the Gulf Coast central issues in the campaign. Although President Bush himself had declared in his Jackson Square speech that 'we have a duty to confront this poverty [revealed by Katrina] with bold action', the Democrats have shown no greater sense of 'duty' or capacity for 'bold action' than a notoriously hypocritical and incompetent White House. Their priorities were exemplified by the six-plank national platform in November that stressed deficits and troop buildups but failed to mention either Katrina or poverty.

Even the Black Caucus, with some individual exceptions, has been surprisingly listless in its response to an unending series of Bush administration provocations (including, most recently, the decisions to knock down 4,000 units of little-damaged public housing in New Orleans and abruptly end housing aid to thousands of Katrina refugees outside the city). Although Harlem's Rangel has promised new congressional hearings on poverty in the light of the New Orleans catastrophe, he is unlikely to defy the leadership's deficit-reduction fetish. It will be easier to hand out more blame (richly deserved, of course) to Republican policies than to roll back tax cuts for the rich to pay for new social spending.

But Nancy, Harry and Hillary do have one domestic crusade whose importance transcends other dogmas and constraints: the promotion of the 'innovation agenda' that the Democrats hope will dramatically solidify their support among hi-tech corporations and science-based firms across the country. If you wanted to find the missing urgency and passion that the Democrats should have focused on Katrina and urban poverty, it was evident last year in the rousing speeches that Pelosi and other leading Democrats delivered in tech hubs like Emeryville, Mountain View, Raleigh and Redmond.

Unlike bringing the troops home from Iraq or rebuilding homes and lives in New Orleans, the innovation agenda is a 'real' Democratic priority. Angry at the Republican failure to renew all-important R&D tax credits for Silicon Valley firms, tech industry leaders, including the CEOs of Cisco and Genentech, worked with Pelosi and her Bay Area Democratic colleagues to develop a list of key demands—including new stock option accounting rules, permanent R&D credits, patent reforms, subsidies for alternative energy, a doubling of funding for the National Science Foundation, and 'network neutrality' for the internet—that the



Democrats have promised to pass in 2007.<sup>41</sup> (Democrats have also long supported the H1-B visa programme that keeps Silicon Valley awash with cheap foreign engineers, most of whom do not have the right to join unions or organize.)<sup>42</sup>

The Democrats' avid interest in patents and innovation was punctually rewarded with a 50 per cent increase (over 2004) in campaign contributions from hi-tech industries to the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee.<sup>43</sup> At the same time, according to the Center for Responsive Politics, while in 2000 the Republican share of Silicon Valley political money 'was 43 per cent, now it's 4 per cent'.<sup>44</sup> Since the first days of the Clinton administration, seducing the software and biotech sectors and their allied venture capitalists (along with deepening already profound ties to entertainment and media industries) has been the Democrats' equivalent of the Republicans' K Street Project.<sup>45</sup> Now, with Al Gore sitting on the boards of Google and Apple, and Pelosi plotting virtual futures with Google founders Larry Page and Sergey Brin, the Millennium has arrived. Indeed with the ascent of Bay Area Democrats to such commanding positions in Congress, New Orleans may continue to moulder in misery, but Silicon Valley and its outliers can now trade pork as equals with the oil men and defence contractors still bunkered inside the White House.

## VI. DARK POPULISM

The Democrats, as Thomas Edsall frequently points out these days, represent two very different and largely incompatible population universes. Two out of five Democratic voters fit the stereotype of 'well-educated, well-off, culturally liberal professionals', but the rest of the party's base are people who are 'socially and economically disadvantaged' in the new Gilded Age: the Black and Latino working classes, white women in

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<sup>41</sup> Jim Puzzanghera, 'Pelosi likely to speak up for tech industry', *Los Angeles Times*, 13 November 2006.

<sup>42</sup> David Bacon, 'Immigrants Find Hi-Tech Servitude in Silicon Valley', *Labor Notes*, September 2000.

<sup>43</sup> Puzzanghera, 'Pelosi likely to speak up'.

<sup>44</sup> CRP communications director Massie Ritsch in one of the *National Journal's* 'Technology Daily' communiqués, August 2006.

<sup>45</sup> See Sara Miles, *How to Hack a Party Line: The Democrats and Silicon Valley*, New York 2001.

lower-end information-sector jobs, and white men in traditional but rapidly shrinking industrial occupations.<sup>46</sup> The post-New Deal Party led by the Clintons is entirely mobilized to articulate and defend the interests of affluent knowledge workers and the globalized industries in which they work; the rest of the Democrats ride in the back of the bus on the cynical assumption that Blacks, immigrants and Rustbelt whites have nowhere else to go and thus are an automatic blue vote.

Since the rise and fall of Jesse Jackson's electrifying 'Rainbow Coalition' campaign in 1984, there has been no serious challenge to the dominance of the New Democrats and their version of 'Third Way' ideology, alloying economic neoliberalism and cultural tolerance. Yet the dream of a new populist, anti-Yuppie uprising, fuelled by righteous blue-collar anger and rousing the party's long neglected majority, has continued to inspire progressives and veterans of the Rainbow as they have suffered under the arrogant yoke of DLC centrists and economic globalizers.

Then, a few days after his stunning upset of George Allen in Virginia, Democratic senator-elect James Webb published an op-ed piece in the *Wall Street Journal* under the provocative headline 'Class Struggle'. Webb, who was Secretary of the Navy under Ronald Reagan, warned that an 'ever-widening divide' of socio-economic inequality was plunging the United States back into 'a class-based system, the likes of which we have not seen since the nineteenth century'. While their wages stagnated and social security declined, working-class Americans were diverted by carefully orchestrated hysteria about 'God, guns, gays, abortion and the flag'. 'The politics of the Karl Rove era', warned the former leading Republican, 'were designed to distract and divide the very people who would ordinarily be rebelling against the deterioration of their way of life.'<sup>47</sup>

Webb's column predictably shocked many *wsj* readers, but it delighted progressives, who recognized that he was quoting almost verbatim from *What's the Matter with Kansas?* and endorsing Tom Frank's call for the Democrats to reclaim the mantle of economic populism. Webb argued that the Democratic victory would ensure that 'American workers [finally] have a chance to be heard' in their legitimate complaints about the social costs of free trade and job export. 'And our government

<sup>46</sup> Thomas Edsall, *National Journal*, 23 September 2006. He uses Pew Research Center data to characterize the Democratic electorate.

<sup>47</sup> James Webb, 'Class Struggle: American workers have a chance to be heard', *Wall Street Journal*, 15 November 2006.

leaders', he intoned, 'have no greater duty than to confront the growing unfairness in this age of globalization.'

Bombast or the manifesto for the long-awaited uprising? Writing in the *Nation* a few weeks later, Christopher Hayes argued that Webb's born-again concern for working-class victims of corporate globalization was part of a genuine populist trend within the Democratic Party, whose standard-bearers also include congressional victor Heath Shuler in North Carolina and new Senator Sherrod Brown in Ohio.<sup>48</sup> Certainly their appeals to economic patriotism (Shuler accused his Republican congressional opponent of 'selling out American families') and strident denunciations of 'internationalists' and 'free traders' struck real sparks in Carolina and Virginia textile towns and the Appalachian counties of Ohio, where whole industries have died in the last decade. In 2004, John Kerry lost the mountains and piedmont (including hardcore Democratic West Virginia) because he had almost nothing to say about the regional jobs crisis; this time around, the Democrats fielded first-class demagoguery in a local drawl.

But as Hayes himself eloquently emphasizes, 'economic populism has a dark side', and he allows that other analysts

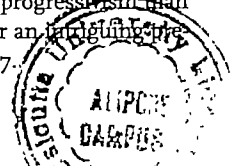
have raised the spectre of the rise of a 'Lou Dobbs'-like wing of the party whose economic arguments are inextricably linked to a racialized nationalism, the kind of populism that's equally comfortable bashing corporations that outsource jobs and 'illegal aliens' who take away Americans' jobs here at home, and whose opposition to the Iraq War, like Pat Buchanan's, is rooted in an America-first isolationism.

Although Hayes prefers to believe in the progressive trend of figures like Webb and Shuler, I think he is most accurate when he compares their politics to racist media demagogues like Dobbs and Buchanan.<sup>49</sup>

A careful reading of Webb's 'class struggle' article, for example, reveals precisely his belief that Mexican gardeners and investment bankers are

<sup>48</sup> Hayes, 'New Democratic Populism'.

<sup>49</sup> Hayes, 'New Democratic Populism'. I leave aside for later discussion the emergent presidential campaign of John Edwards who, in a quest to outflank Hillary on the left, has seemingly embraced a more robust and authentic progressivism than the trick-populism that disappointed his followers in 2004. For an interesting preview, see Perry Bacon, 'The Anti-Clinton', *Time*, 15 January 2007.



coequal exploiters of the native working class, with a 'vast underground labour pool from illegal immigration' waiting to drown American values and wages. A strange passage about the 'unspoken insinuation' that 'certain immigrant groups have the "right genetics" and thus are natural entrants to the "overclass"' can be decoded as a reference to the Yellow Peril fantasies that infuse Webb's public utterances. As Secretary of the Navy he was one of the principal advocates of a continuing Cold War with China, which he later saw developing a 'strategic axis with the Muslim world', and he broke with Bush policies in Iraq precisely because he feared that Rumsfeld was criminally 'empowering' the real enemies—Iran and China.<sup>50</sup>

Heath Shuler, the former star quarterback for the Washington Redskins, likewise turns many hard hats his way with passionate screeds against North American Free Trade and the export of Heartland jobs. But like Webb's, his populist message is poisoned by a nativism that includes television campaign ads depicting Shuler as a lone hero fighting against amnesty for illegal immigrants. Ezra Klein in *American Prospect* recently argued that liberals should not worry unduly about the jingoism of Webb and Shuler, or about their reactionary positions on gays and abortion. In a Congress dominated by Democrats, Klein explains, 'they'll have precious little opportunity to exercise their social conservatism. Their economic beliefs, however, will get more play in a Congress aching to, at long last, turn its attention to health care, jobs, inequality, corporate regulation and all the other domestic issues Democrats so love to address.'<sup>51</sup>

Aside from Klein's heroic assumptions about Democrats' reforming intentions, he seriously underestimates the dangers posed by economic nationalism within Democratic ranks. Karl Rove and the White House, for their part, were dramatically blindsided over the last year by the explosion of anti-immigrant hysteria within the conservative grass roots; and the editors of *American Prospect* (the magazine of 'progressive Democrats') may yet rue their underestimation of Democratic xenophobia. At least half of the 30 seats that the Democrats took from Republicans were won by candidates with conservative positions on immigration. Throughout the South and Midwest, moreover, Democrats attacked Republicans for

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<sup>50</sup> James Webb, 'What to do about China?', *New York Times*, 15 June 1998; and 'Heading for Trouble', *Washington Post*, 4 September 2002.

<sup>51</sup> Klein, 'Spinned Right'.

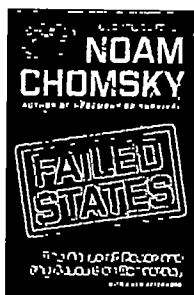
being 'soft on illegal immigration', and one Democratic senate campaign committee's website even juxtaposed images of people scaling border fences with portraits of bin Laden and Kim Jong Il. The Blue Dogs, in particular, are avid supporters of a continental-scale border wall and the use of local police to enforce national immigration laws.<sup>52</sup>

In the new Congress it will be interesting to see how far the Webbs and Shulers travel with their 'proletarian' attacks on the free-trade principles held sacred by New Dems and Clintonians. (My hunch is that the hidden injuries of class will matter less to both politicians after they have had some heartwarming conversations with the wealthy hi-tech types in the Research Triangle and Beltway science parks.) On the other hand, there is a very real chance that the anti-immigrant and sinophobic aspects of their erstwhile populism will be amplified in synergy with like-minded Republicans. The Democrats can take temporary delight in the self-destruction of the Republicans' 'Latino strategy', but they are not immune to such devils within their own party. In the worst-case scenario, the long-hoped-for New Populism would simply become midwife to a bipartisan regroupment of bigots and cranks, while the Democratic leadership continues to take its cues from Goldman Sachs and Genentech.

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<sup>52</sup> Brian Friel, 'Splits of Their Own,' *National Journal*, 9 September 2006.

# We've Got Issues.

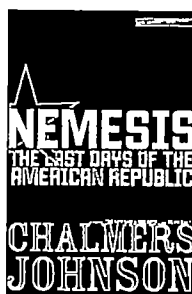


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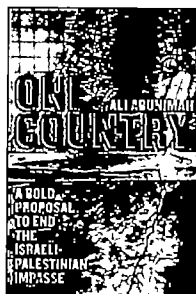


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ROBERT BRENNER

## STRUCTURE *vs* CONJUNCTURE

### *The 2006 Elections and the Rightward Shift*

**H**OW SHOULD THE Democrats' 2006 recapture of Congress be interpreted in the context of the broader trends in American politics over the last decades? In what follows, I will examine the development of the two parties against the background of underlying shifts in the balance of class forces in America, to read the conjuncture of 2006 against the deeper structural movements of the American polity—from the labour struggles of the 1930s and construction of the New Deal Democrats, through the Great Society reforms of the postwar boom, to the political paradigms of the capitalist offensive with the onset of the long downturn. Within this framework, I will argue that the rise of the Republican right, building from bases in an expanding, non-unionized South, has introduced a new dynamic into US politics that aims to push the pro-corporate agenda beyond anything even Reagan had contemplated.

#### I. THE DEMOCRATS' VICTORY

The results themselves have already received much scrutiny. Broadly speaking, the basis for the Democrats' victory in the 2006 mid-terms lay in swings of 4–6 per cent in their favour among nearly every category of the electorate, plus a highly significant 14 per cent swing among Latinos.<sup>1</sup> This enabled the Democrats to increase their House delegation

from 201 to 233 seats, with the Republicans dropping from 232 to 202. In the Senate, the DP won six new seats, to move from 45 to 51 (including two independents), while GOP seats fell from 55 to 49.

Though some have hailed a new thrust toward social reform,<sup>2</sup> it is generally acknowledged that the vote represented a repudiation of the Bush Administration's record rather than a surge of positive support for the Democrats. Throughout October 2006, American TV screens were dominated by images of increasing mayhem and communal strife in Mesopotamia, with sixteen intelligence agencies reporting that the war was fuelling terrorism, not reducing it. In addition, corruption exposés and sex scandals laid bare the hypocrisy of the Republican-fundamentalist charade; Katrina remained a running sore; 'homeland security', like Iraq reconstruction, was sold to the highest bidder—against a background of poor jobs performance, real-wage stagnation, and dwindling pensions and health insurance. But it is of course America's failure in Iraq that has made this such an exceptional electoral conjuncture.<sup>3</sup>

Since 9/11, Karl Rove's strategy has been to portray first Afghanistan and then Iraq as the central arenas in the 'war on terror', in order to win the popular support the Bush Administration needed for the implementation of its pro-business agenda, which could not have prevailed electorally on its own. Rove was successful in 2002 and 2004, when worry about national security outweighed mounting opposition to the war. The swing votes of married women with children, the so-called 'security moms', had favoured the Republicans by, respectively, 53 and 56 per cent. But by 2006, the moms were supporting the Democrats by a 12-point margin, 50 per cent to 38 per cent. Fifty-seven per cent of Americans (against 35

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<sup>1</sup> By comparison to the House elections of 2004, the Democrats won a swing of 6 per cent of the white male vote, 4 per cent of the white female vote, 5 per cent of 18–29 year olds, 4 per cent of those making less than \$50,000, and 6 per cent of those making over \$50,000, while maintaining 89 per cent of the Black vote. Democrats made strong inroads in the Midwest, Northeast, South and West, giving a Democratic plurality of 4.4m votes, compared to a Republican plurality of 3.6m in 2002. With respect to 2002, the 2006 mid-terms witnessed a 5.5 per cent shift from Republicans to Democrats.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Michael Tomasky, 'Dems put the "big tent" back together', *Los Angeles Times*, 12 November 2006; John Nichols, 'Power Shifts in the States', *Nation*, 4 December 2006

<sup>3</sup> Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 'Iraq Looms Large in Nationalized Election', 5 October 2006, p. 7.



per cent) now felt that the Iraq war had failed to make the country more secure. Herein lies the nub of the 2006 election.<sup>4</sup>

Nevertheless, the Republicans have held their own to a remarkable extent. Their base turned out in force, with white evangelicals increasing their share of the total vote from 23 to 24 per cent, while the figure for those attending church at least once a week rose from 41 to 45 per cent, albeit on a significantly smaller overall turnout.<sup>5</sup> In their southern heartland the Republicans retained all their House seats save for two in the Miami area—which in socio-political terms barely counts as the South—and one in North Carolina, where former pro-football star Heath Shuler ousted John Taylor.<sup>6</sup> More serious was the narrow defeat of Virginia Senator George Allen, a party leader and standard-bearer of the right, by a Reagan-era Navy Secretary, James Webb; but since the seat was lost by such a slender margin, following an unusually gaffe-prone campaign, the broader significance for the Republicans is moot. Overall, Rove must be comforted by the degree to which the Republicans retained their popular following, despite the debacle of Iraq and with the Administration having forced through a raft of blatantly pro-business legislation.<sup>7</sup> In 2000 Bush ran as a 'compassionate conservative', and the Republicans won 48 per cent of the House total popular vote. By 2006, compassion had been entirely abandoned, yet the Republicans still garnered 46 per cent. In 2000, 36 per cent of those voting had described themselves as Republicans; in 2006, 35 per cent still did.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Jim VandeHei, 'Republicans Losing the "Security Moms"', *Washington Post*, 18 August 2006; CNN Exit Polls for the House of Representatives, 2004 and 2006.

<sup>5</sup> White evangelicals voted 70 per cent GOP, 28 per cent DP, those attending church at least once a week voted 55 per cent GOP, 43 per cent DP. Though 3–4 per cent fewer voters in these categories went Republican than in 2004, given the overall swing toward the Democrats of 4–5 per cent these small declines cannot be taken as indicative of the longer-run trend.

<sup>6</sup> The Republicans had previously attempted to recruit Shuler, a conservative anti-abortionist, for their own ticket, but he was persuaded to run as a Democrat by Rahm Emanuel.

<sup>7</sup> Most salient are the Class Action Fairness Act, reducing the effectiveness of class action suits; the Bankruptcy Abuse Prevention and Consumer Protection Act, reducing protection for the country's indebted working class. In addition, the Energy Policy Act, Medicare Prescription Drug Act and Estate Tax Relief Act constituted huge giveaways to oil, pharmaceuticals and the ultra-rich. Republican tax cuts, skewed toward top income brackets, have produced an annual deficit equivalent to 2 per cent of GDP, with obvious implications for social spending.

<sup>8</sup> CNN Exit Polls for the House of Representatives, 2006.

Passive beneficiaries of the fallout from Iraq, the Democrats had run a national campaign without a discernible programme—and this entirely by design.<sup>9</sup> Their strategy, under the direction of Rahm Emanuel, head of the party's Congressional Campaign Committee, was to field hand-picked centrist and conservative candidates in the most marginal districts, focusing entirely on the Bush Administration's failings.<sup>10</sup> As a result, their newly elected members of Congress will largely serve to strengthen the right wing of the party, which longs for nothing more than a return to the glory years of Bill Clinton, when balanced budgets and neoliberalism were the order of the day, Lincoln's Bedroom was always occupied and triangulation was the highest principle.

As much as anyone, Emanuel exemplifies today's Democratic Party and is likely to be among those setting its future direction. A top political operative under Clinton, he has played a leading role in the 'modernizing' Democratic Leadership Council, formed in 1984 to adapt the Party to the Reagan era. The DLC-New Democrats' aim is to expand their access to business, to the white vote and to the South—the assumption being that traditional black and working-class Democrat constituencies will have nowhere else to go. This means support for stepped-up military spending and US imperial ventures, advocacy of tax breaks and other pro-business policies, and the termination of any remaining socially redistributive commitments to the labour movement and black organizations. The DLC now have sixty representatives in the House, over a quarter of the Democrats' total roll. In addition, the Party's ultra-conservative Blue Dog caucus now has 44 representatives, up by seven since 2004. Formed in 1994 by right-wing congressional Democrats, particularly—but not solely—from the South, to counter what they saw as a left-wing Party majority, the group lean to conservatism not just

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<sup>9</sup> In the words of the non-partisan Cook Political Report, 'This was a campaign that was run explicitly to be devoid of issues. They never had to outline their own positions . . . which makes it very hard to know exactly where these folks are coming from'. 'Five Myths About the Midterm Elections', *Time*, 16 November 2006.

<sup>10</sup> On the morrow of the vote, some 65 per cent thought that the result was due to dissatisfaction with the Republicans; only 27 per cent believed the Democrats had won by virtue of having better candidates. Democrats won 57 per cent of self-identified 'independent' voters in 2006, compared to 49 per cent in 2004, and 61 per cent of self-styled 'moderates', compared to 56 per cent in 2004. See Marcus Mabry, 'Newsweek Poll: Bush Hits New Low', *MSNBC.com*, 11 November 2006; CNN National Exit Polls, 2004 and 2006; 'Centrists Deliver for Democrats', Pew Research Center, 8 November 2006.

on 'social issues' like abortion and gun control, but also on economic policy. 'Pro-growth' and committed to 'fiscal responsibility', many Blue Dogs voted in favour of the Bush Administration's most socially regressive measures. On the eight major pieces of legislation that divided the Democrat and Republican majorities in the 2004-5 session of Congress, 45 per cent of Blue Dog votes backed the Republicans.<sup>11</sup>

In the wake of the 2006 mid-terms, the victorious DP conservatives have been flexing their muscles. As Arkansas representative Mike Ross announced: 'Republicans lost their seats not to liberals but to Blue Dog Democrats . . . We'll have a lot to say about what passes and what doesn't.' Tennessee representative John Tanner has stated: 'We increased our market share by going where the market was, to moderate, even Republican, districts . . . If we're going to hold and consolidate that, we have to understand the reality that the face of the Democratic Caucus has changed from where it was in the late 80s and early 90s.' Naturally this is welcome news to the House Republican leadership.<sup>12</sup>

## II. THE RIGHTWARD TRAJECTORY

The Democrats' electoral-legislative strategy and likely future trajectory make manifest the transformation of the American polity over the past half-century. From the hegemony of liberalism, in which the Democrats made the running and to which the Republicans had to adapt, this has shifted to an ascendancy of the right, in which the Republicans have been the driving force, and with respect to which the Democrats have been obliged to remake themselves. This shift was itself the expression of an underlying evolution in the balance of class forces and the pattern of capital accumulation. This had been shaped; first, by an unprecedented explosion of working-class power in the 1930s, followed by a quarter-century of prosperity accompanied by the decline of labour. The onset of profitability problems from the 1960s then made for long-term economic stagnation, paralleled by an unending offensive of capital

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<sup>11</sup> Chris Bowers, 'Congressional Loyalty Scorecards, Part Four Blue Dog Democrats', MyDD.com.

<sup>12</sup> Jonathan Weissman, 'Democrats Find Lessons in GOP Reign', *Washington Post*, 12 November 2006. For Blue Dog Democrats see the website of Congressman Tanner, a founding member: [www.house.gov/tanner/blue.htm](http://www.house.gov/tanner/blue.htm).

that led ultimately to Clintonomics, and then to the hard-right Bush Administration. To this progression I now turn.

*Rise, persistence and collapse of liberalism, 1932–80*

Against the background of the Great Depression and Hoover's initial calamitous response, it was the great upsurge of industrial militancy across manufacturing in the mid-30s that created the transformations in working-class political consciousness and organization that were the basis for the rise and reproduction of American liberal reformism.<sup>33</sup> It was this explosion of mass direct action outside the electoral-legislative arena that constituted the indispensable precondition for the popular gains of the New Deal. Industrial unions were established in the face of determined employer resistance, and under conditions of increasing political radicalization. Thus the newly-established United Auto Workers initially refused to support the Democratic ticket and, at their founding convention in 1936, called for the formation of independent farmer-labour parties. During this period, such parties flourished at local and state level across the country. In 1934, the Democrats' congressional landslide in the mid-term elections had already been understood as the expression of an ascending left. Working-class militancy now made for sufficient pressure to oblige the Roosevelt Administration, which had been dragging its feet, to pass its centrepiece reform legislation: the 1935 Social Security Act and Wagner Act, recognizing trade union rights.

But having 'trusted in Roosevelt', the CIO unions experienced a devastating defeat at Little Steel in May 1937, and then a further demoralization during the 'second great depression' of 1937–38. A new layer of full-time CIO leaders also played a significant part in the domestication of worker militancy, helping to repress the wave of wildcat and sit-down strikes that broke out across industry in the winter and spring of 1937, and failing to press home a potential victory against the Chrysler corporation. The Communist Party, which had played a decisive role in organizing the mid-30s CIO upsurge, now followed Moscow's line in committing itself to a Popular Front that included not only John Lewis's CIO and the Democratic Party, but also the Roosevelt Administration. Meanwhile, increasingly separated from the daily activity of the shop

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<sup>33</sup> Worker militancy reached its zenith in the Great Textile strike of 1934, the successful general strikes in Toledo, San Francisco and Minneapolis of the same year, and the sit-down strikes at General Motors in 1936–37.

floor and dependent on the union itself for their livelihood, an emergent CIO officialdom reacted to the fall-off in mass struggles by turning to the institutionalization of union–employer relations, through state-sanctioned collective bargaining and regulation. This entailed a full commitment to the electoral road and to the Democratic Party, as a vehicle through which to win further reforms via the legislative process.<sup>14</sup>

The support of organized labour brought not only a huge increase in the Democrats' electoral base but a huge fillip to their electioneering efforts, as the CIO unions provided funds and foot soldiers for elections, as well as lobbying pressure. But it also set in motion a longer-term process that undermined not only the power of the unions but also the potential of the Party as a vehicle for social redistribution. By failing to enhance their own strength, independent of the DP, through standing up to the corporations, the trade unions increasingly forfeited their leverage over the Party, yet were still left to rely upon it to produce the goods for their members. Consequently, Democrat leaders could count on the unions' support while delivering ever less in return. With labour's backing taken for granted, the DP leadership was free to manoeuvre with the forces on their right, notably the Party's Southern wing; this would set inevitable limits on any reform programme. In doing so Democrat leaders, like trade union officials, served only to further the disintegration of organized labour—their most powerful social base. A comparable process would be repeated with the black, women's and Latino movements, all of which originated in independent direct action in the streets and workplaces, throwing up militant new organizations; but whose emergent middle-class leaderships ultimately came to rest, alongside labour officialdom, inside the DP cocoon.

World War II brought big gains in membership for the trade unions, at the price of further emasculation and bureaucratization. Government patronage, in return for a no-strike pledge, raised the prestige of labour's 'new men of power' to hitherto inconceivable heights—but in the context of a triumphant politico-economic revival of the corporations, based on record-breaking profits, and the subordination of labour to government and business in the tripartite administration of the war effort. A powerful postwar strike wave in 1946 won minimal gains, dashing union hopes for a price-control system that would allow the labour movement to offer a form of social-democratic leadership to the working class as a

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<sup>14</sup> See especially Mike Davis, *Prisoners of the American Dream*, London 1986.

whole. The resulting demoralization was expressed in a sharp drop in working-class turnout for the 1946 mid-term elections, which issued in a swing to the Republicans. The red-baiting assault on labour that followed would culminate in the 1947 Taft-Hartley Act, placing decisive curbs on union power.<sup>15</sup>

More damaging in the long term was the failure to unionize the South through Operation Dixie. For this campaign to have succeeded, the labour leadership would have had to unleash mass social struggles, comparable to those of the 1930s, against the entrenched southern elite; but they had no intention of risking this sort of confrontation. This failure would later permit this low-wage, low-tax region to become the setting for the first wave of US corporate globalization, undermining the strength of labour in the rest of the economy. The labour movement would see a brief revival during the Korean War and after. But by the end of the 1950s, feeling the first pangs of international competition from emerging European and Japanese industry, the corporations dealt the unions a series of devastating blows in autos, electrical-goods and steel. The rate of private-sector unionization peaked in 1953 at 36 per cent; but this fell to 31 per cent in 1963, 27 per cent in 1973 and would decline continuously thereafter.<sup>16</sup>

Paradoxically it was at this point, from the early 1960s, with the trade-union movement greatly weakened, that the extension of the postwar boom brought a new lease of life to projects for (mild, state-managed) social redistribution, and to the 'political liberalism' of the Democratic Party in general. The expanding US economy allowed corporate profits, take-home pay and social spending to rise together. Within this context, labour and other social-reform-minded forces within the Party moved to outline the 'Great Society' programme—which the Republicans, too, would find themselves obliged to support. Even during the Truman and Eisenhower administrations, these forces had played an important role in making social-security benefits broadly available, albeit financed by an ultra-regressive payroll tax on workers. The Democrats' reform aspirations were always limited by the priority they gave to capitalist profits, both

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<sup>15</sup> The Act outlawed secondary boycotts, undercut the union shop, sanctioned state-level strike-breaking legislation ('right to work' laws), and targeted Communist unions and leaders.

<sup>16</sup> On the mid-century decline of the unions, see Michael Goldfield, *The Decline of Organized Labor in the United States*, Chicago 1987; Nelson Lichtenstein, *State of the Union. A Century of American Labor*, Princeton 2002.

in terms of ensuring the general process of capital accumulation, and in attracting business funding for themselves. This entailed a programme of encouraging foreign direct investment in Europe and elsewhere, pushing for free trade, and patronizing the newly emerging Euromarkets as a base for mobile capital—all of which would further weaken American labour's leverage. It also meant retaining the Taft–Hartley Act, despite ever-larger Democratic congressional majorities won in 1958 and 1964, based on increasing urban and working-class populations.

It required the rise of the black civil rights movement, and especially its extension to the North, to induce the Democrats to turn once more towards serious social reform. The demand for jobs was central in the 1963 March on Washington. Black rebellions in New York, Philadelphia and Los Angeles in 1964–65 extended the movement's goals beyond political equality to economic well-being. Against the backdrop of Vietnam, and expanding Third World struggles, the Johnson Administration launched not only landmark civil-rights and voter legislation but also, very consciously, the greatest expansion of the welfare state since Roosevelt. The panoply of 'Great Society' reforms included Medicaid, Medicare, the Food Stamp programme, Supplemental Security Income, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, and Head Start. So hegemonic was this programme in the early 70s that for Nixon—in the context of Black Power and mass anti-war movements—it was electoral common sense to step it up. A substantial increase in social security benefits, expanding unionization for federal government workers, a proposed Guaranteed Annual Wage (rejected by the Democrats), creation of the Legal Services Corporation (Legal Aid), the Environmental Protection Agency, the Consumer Product Safety Commission, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration and (under Gerald Ford) initiation of the Earned Income Tax Credit scheme, were the results. Apparently permanent prosperity, assured by federal deficits, made for what seemed to be an open-ended programme of social reform, whichever party was in power. As Nixon put it, 'We're all Keynesians now.'

### *Onset of the downturn*

But this high tide of social reform was very brief. From the mid-60s the rate of return on capital began to fall, and continued to do so over the next decade and a half, reducing the pre-tax rate of return for non-financial corporations by 35 per cent between 1965 and 1979; and introducing,

from 1973, an extended epoch of stagnation and crisis of even greater length than the postwar boom. In response, employers unleashed an intensifying assault on labour organization and working-class living standards that has not abated to this day. The 'Great Society' increases in social spending and business regulation had been premised upon a regime of high profits, economic expansion, and the taming of working-class and other social rebellions. The profitability crisis and employers' offensive left DP liberals politically disarmed, obliged by their own principles to subordinate all else to the recovery of the rate of return. The collapse of the social reform project was the inevitable outcome.

In the early 1960s trade-union leaders had stood passively by as American industry, increasingly challenged by rivals in Germany and Japan, sought to revive competitiveness by pushing through what was then termed 'a new hard line'. The growth of manufacturing wages for the period 1960–69 was half that of 1948–59, despite the continued economic expansion. Under rising pressure from their members, labour leaders did organize a series of strikes later in the 60s; but they made a more systematic—and successful—effort to crush the series of rank-and-file revolts that broke out in trucking, auto, telephones, mining and elsewhere. Union officials now had to face the wrath of corporations determined to intensify work rates and reduce wage growth, whatever the risk of strike action, so as to counter falling profits and increasing international competition. Between 1973 and 1979, days lost in strike action fell by about a quarter, and private-sector unionization rates dropped to 22 per cent. Real wages in the private sector had ceased to rise by 1972; they would now fall for the remainder of the 1970s and 80s, and much of the 90s.

In the wake of Watergate—and in the midst of a recession that would turn out to be the worst since the 1930s—the Democrats picked up 49 seats in the 1974 mid-term elections, to secure their biggest House majority since the New Deal. In 1976 Carter won the Presidency, by a narrow margin. But in the space of barely half a decade, the meaning of Democratic control of government had been completely transformed and the prospects for further 'Great Society' reform extinguished. In part, this was because the new congressional intake was of a different political stripe to its predecessors, who had first won office in the halcyon days of boom-era liberalism. The incoming 1970s 'moderates' had won their seats due to the revulsion against Nixon in relatively affluent suburbs, hitherto Republican; their highest priority was to hold down spending so as to



reduce taxation. But the underlying reason for the Democrats' precipitous retreat from a reform agenda was that, with the economy gone sour, the corporations on a rampage, and the unions wilting under fire, they found themselves operating in a transformed socio-political environment.

### *The American exception*

The 1970s crisis of profitability was, of course, virtually universal across the advanced capitalist economies, as was the commitment of all mainstream political parties—from Social Democracy and left Liberals to Christian Democrats and Tories—to a revival of capital accumulation, premised on a recovery of capitalist profits. Over the course of the 1970s, wage and social-spending growth slowed almost everywhere. But adaptations to the downturn took place in the context of distinctive balances of class forces across the capitalist north, and this made for a significant variation in politico-economic outcomes. In contrast to the declining rate of unionization in the US private sector, most of the advanced capitalist economies of Western Europe witnessed the opposite trend—an increase in union density not just during the 1950s and 1960s, but throughout the 1970s and, in places, the 1980s. Even by the later 1990s, unionization rates in several European countries remained far above the US peak of the 1950s, and few had experienced substantial fall-offs.<sup>77</sup> West European labour was not sufficiently strong or united to prevent a negative shift in the balance of class power, resist the global trend to austerity, or prevent a decline in its own strength within industry and on the shop floor. But in many instances it was able to secure a certain political stasis. With the exception of the UK, nowhere in Western Europe was there the perpetual and accelerating slide to the right to be found in the US during the 1980s and 1990s.

This divergence in political trajectories between the Anglo-Saxon and continental capitalist economies was registered in the latter's ability not only to maintain welfare states which, by 1980, were distinctly more generous than America's, but to achieve a significant increase in social spending. This rose from 22.6 to 26 per cent of GDP in northern Europe between 1980 and 2000, but from 13.3 to 14.2 per cent in the US. By the end of the century, the population in poverty in the US, at 17 per cent,

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<sup>77</sup> 'Labor History Symposium', *Labor History*, vol. 47, no. 4, p. 573, citing Gerald Friedman, *Reigniting the Labor Movement*, London, forthcoming.

was at least twice as high as that of Western Europe.<sup>18</sup> In the US, it was the disintegration of the labour movement, and of working-class power more generally, that was the central factor in opening the way for the reconfiguration of politics under the onslaught of the corporations.

Even during their 'golden age' of reform, between 1948 and 1973, the Democrats' efforts to extend the Rooseveltian settlement had a certain paradoxical and tentative character. This is because they were accompanied by the steady decline of what had been the major agent of reform, and the Democrats' key electoral base—organized labour. It was, as we have seen, the postwar boom that allowed social spending to expand without cost to profits, significant redistribution of income, or undue pressure on working-class wages; and with relatively little pressure from social movements. The more or less continuous fall of profitability between 1965 and 1979, issuing into a long epoch of slowed growth, deprived the reform thrust of its fundamental enabling condition.<sup>19</sup>

Symptomatically, it was the Carter Administration—not that of Reagan—which launched the first assault on reform-era American liberalism, pushing for de-regulation so as to undercut union power in such major industries as trucking and airlines. As a precondition to bailing out the Chrysler corporation in 1980, Carter insisted on extracting major concessions from the United Auto Workers—prefiguring Reagan's attack on PATCO. The Democratic Congress followed suit, rejecting progressive legislation on consumer protection, election-day registration and labour-law reform. In a telling sequence, the Carter Administration was obliged to approve a law cutting the tax rate on capital gains, after having initially forwarded to Congress a bill aiming at more progressive taxation. When Keynesian policies not only proved ineffective in restoring profitability but gave rise to runaway inflation, 'growth liberalism' was effectively dead.

### *Shift to the right*

With the onset of the long downturn, and the political vacuum left by liberalism's collapse, American corporations became the driving force

<sup>18</sup> Donatella Gatti and Andrew Glyn, 'Welfare States in Hard Times', *Oxford Review of Economic Policy*, vol. 22, 2006, especially pp. 307–8; OECD Social Expenditures Data Base, 2004. I wish to thank Andrew Glyn for forwarding this dataset to me.

<sup>19</sup> In the following sections I am much indebted to Thomas Edsall, *The New Politics of Inequality*, New York 1984; Thomas Edsall and Mary Edsall, *Chain Reaction. The Impact of Race, Rights and Taxes on American Politics*, New York 1991; and Thomas Ferguson and Joel Rogers, *Right Turn*, New York 1986.

that would shift the polity to the right. But the growing success of the business agenda within the halls of government is inexplicable purely in terms of corporate mobilization. Its scope depended on the ability of the Republicans to develop a new hegemonic project that would replace 'Great Society' liberalism and offer an alternative model to significant sections of the working class. The process seems to have taken place in three overlapping phases: first, Nixon's 'southern strategy' in the 1960s; second, through the 'tax revolt' of the 1970s; and third, in response to a new Republican far right, rooted especially in the South.

Between 1932 and 1964, the Democrats had a vast preponderance among the white working-class electorate and, on this basis, dominated the political arena. In 1948 they took more than 75 per cent of white working-class votes; though dropping to 58 per cent in 1960, the figure rose again to 75 per cent in 1964, when Republican presidential candidate Barry Goldwater ran on a hard-right programme of smashing the unions, demolishing the welfare state and implementing an aggressive Cold War foreign policy—and met with resounding defeat. But when the Democrats took up the civil rights agenda, pushing through court-enforced integration of schools, housing and jobs, as well as social-spending programmes that primarily benefited poor blacks—at a time of black urban rebellion, as well as women's liberation and the anti-war movement—the Democrats' share of the white working-class vote plunged to 45 per cent in 1968, and to 38 per cent when McGovern ran in 1972.<sup>20</sup>

During these years, Nixon's 'southern strategy' was able to detach a significant section of the white working class from the Democrats by making a fairly explicit appeal to racism, blaming the government and congressional Democrats for the costs the state was imposing on white workers to fund 'hand-outs' for blacks. Yet a qualification must be entered: Nixon was able to succeed electorally in this period only by deepening his identification with 'Great Society' liberal reform. Indeed, had the postwar boom continued, the longer-run electoral implication of Nixon's victories might have looked rather different. Even in 1970, the Democrats' control over Congress was still as strong as it had been in 1962; in 1976 Carter secured over 50 per cent of the white working-class

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<sup>20</sup> Paul Abramson, John Aldrich and David Rohde, 'Social Forces and the Vote', *Change and Continuity in the 2000 and 2002 Elections*, Washington, DC 2003, p. 112.

vote, and the Democrats won their greatest congressional majorities of the postwar epoch.

It took the deepening economic crisis of the 1970s to create the conditions for the second stage of the Republicans' project: to win over white working-class voters on a straightforwardly right-wing basis. Between 1972 and 1980, real weekly wages fell by 7 per cent. At the same time, due to 'bracket creep', a rising proportion of the working class became liable to higher tax rates. By 1976, a median-income family was taxed at nearly 23 per cent, compared to under 12 per cent in 1953. The highly regressive social-security tax bore ever more heavily, with the maximum liability growing from \$144 in 1960 to \$825 in 1975—a sum equally payable by a family earning \$14,100 a year and one earning \$75,000.<sup>21</sup> Workers unable to defend their economic position through a much-weakened and demoralized labour movement were more open to doing so by 'joining the tax revolt'—responding to an ideological appeal that was, in effect, a cross-class alliance with business. The success of Proposition 13 in California in 1978 constituted a turning point, finding a significant echo across the country. Its proponents appealed to an anti-statist individualism, given a racist twist by pointing to the Carter Administration and congressional Democrats' ostensible favouritism to inner-city blacks and associated 'softness' on crime, welfare, prisoners and so forth. Reagan's ability to consolidate support for this message across much of the white working-class electorate was his major domestic contribution to the rightward shift. His de facto prohibition on raising taxes constituted a crucial step forward for the Republicans in naturalizing the business agenda.

### *Rise of the new right*

But by this time the South was beginning to provide both a template and an electoral base for the rise of a new Republican right. The Democratic Party's 1960s turn to civil rights, while winning it overwhelming support among the black electorate, had freed the white conservative South, and especially its emerging business layer, to forge a new alliance with an already pro-business Republican Party, providing the latter with the potential for a historic increase in its national power. This was not because the South represented a backward, retrograde region; on the

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<sup>21</sup> Edsall, *New Politics of Inequality*, pp. 211ff; Edsall and Edsall, *Chain Reaction*, pp. 105–6.

contrary. The ascent of the Republican far right in the South was tied to the rise of a dynamic industrial capitalism across this region over the second half of the twentieth century.

As the North declined industrially, the South rose. Between 1955 and 1975, the share of the thirteen southern states in the national manufacturing labour force leapt by 50 per cent, making the South the home of 30 per cent of manufacturing labour. By the 1990s, the South was as industrialized and urbanized as the North and matched it in virtually every indicator of capitalist advance—except, not accidentally, levels of real wages, taxation, social spending and trade unionization. In other words, it provided the template for the political economy that the Republican right wished to impose on the US as a whole, as well as the first port of call for an unending process of American globalization. The right was thus able to construct its new power base in an already favourable political environment. The South's reactionary capitalists were among the main forces in the far-right mobilization that ultimately issued in the Goldwater campaign. Its so-called middle-class layers, meaning those from the relatively well-off suburbs, were already extremely conservative and implacably opposed to all aspects of the Great Society settlement, especially welfare 'hand-outs'. Southern workers were politically atomized, individualized in the extreme, and therefore unusually open—not to say historically prepared—to embrace non-class forms of solidarity: race, the patriarchal family, nationalism-cum-militarism, and Protestant fundamentalism, now linked to Zionist expansionism.

The right's electoral rise in the South—the third phase in the process that would ultimately make possible both the foreign and domestic policy departures of the post-2001 Bush Administrations—took place relatively slowly, especially below the presidential level. Thanks to the Goldwater campaign's repudiation of the civil-rights movement, the Republicans gained an initial bridgehead in the five Deep South states in 1964. Republican success in presidential elections soon followed, especially as blacks did not constitute a large enough majority in any state to stand in the way. But after the Republicans had won an initial quotient of seats during the second half of the 1960s, the struggle for control of southern congressional delegations proved much more difficult. This was, in part, because blacks did make up large proportions of the electorate at district level; in part, because Democrats had plenty of room to adapt on a local basis to racial and political conservatism. Republican advance

actually ceased following Watergate. But it gained a major political and ideological impetus during Reagan's rhetorically, if not necessarily substantively, far-right administration, which, by appearing to enhance Republican hopes for national power, gave southerners a reason to break long-standing ties with Democrats. It was during the Reagan era that the new southern-based Republican congressional leadership—from Newt Gingrich to Tom DeLay—first gained office and began to organize.

The new Republican right had made its point of departure a dynamic, modernizing South that was already the most right-wing region of the country, possessed of the weakest trade unions and welfare infrastructures. To this core base, it sought to add an analogously right-wing Mountain region, shorn of its once radical miners; suburbs and exurbs across the country that had become the new redoubts of white working-class families, in flight from both black or Latino inner cities and increasingly expensive older suburbs. It aimed to appeal especially to white working-class men, suffering long-term economic decline compounded by new threats to patriarchal authority. With these forces, combined with its traditional backers in what remained of small-town America, the Republican right appeared to have the electoral potential to break beyond America's anaemic version of welfare statism and to launch a new imperial project. In other words, it could hope to amass sufficient white working-class support to realize its straightforwardly anti-working class project—and thus to overcome the problem that had bedevilled the American right since Goldwater: how to win electoral support for a domestic programme that was transparently against the economic interests of the great mass of the population, and a foreign policy that appeared both reckless and redundant?

The answer, as we have seen, was to look to the South, both as model and as electoral base, to construct an anti-statist individualist ideology founded on white supremacy, defence of the patriarchal family and Protestant fundamentalism. It was the Republican right's success in constructing this ideological formula, and in identifying the liberal state as a central threat to the racial status quo and 'traditional family values', that provided it with the wherewithal to contend for power on a brazenly pro-business programme. Its targets were the key aspects of the New Deal–Great Society settlement that no administration, Democrat or Republican, had so far dared to touch: Social Security, progressive taxation and (a good part of) the business regulatory regime, including the

EPA and OSHA. The Reagan Revolution had been pulled up short by the deep recession of 1981–82, which allowed the Democrats to recover lost ground in the House and limited the Republicans' momentum. Reagan was obliged to rescind a good part of his tax relief to the rich and restore a significant share of social spending. To transcend this stalemate was the project of the Republican right.

### *The Democrats' response*

Just as the corporations and the Republicans had been obliged to adapt to a context defined by the liberalism of the Democrats' New Deal–Great Society project and the residual power of the labour movement during the postwar boom era, so from the mid-70s the Democrats, in a period defined by economic stagnation and the ever-increasing power of business, would accommodate to the Republican-driven push to the right. In Congress, the Democrats' initial response to the rightward shift of the 1970s was defensive and conservative. Above all, they sought to milk their long-term House majority for all it was worth, blocking Republican initiatives while at the same time impressing upon corporate contributors the need to pay the elected pipers. If American business had always preferred the Republicans, during the postwar boom it saw little alternative but to provide material support to a Democratic Party that, throughout most of the period, maintained an overwhelming grip on Congress (and always put corporate profits first). By the late 70s, just as the Democrats had abandoned their social-reform project, the giant corporations undertook an accelerated process of political organization—amassing funds, systematizing their lobbying procedures, and nurturing new think-tanks to flesh out an ambitious pro-business agenda. The recently established Business Roundtable and the Chamber of Commerce were central to this mobilization. In 1974 labour was still raising more in political funding than the corporate and trade association Political Action Committees. By 1984 the latter were raising two and half times as much as labour; probably three times as much, if hard-right PACs were taken into account. Over this period, total PAC contributions increased from \$45 million to \$175 million.

The carrot-and-stick of corporate money was already playing an often decisive role in tipping legislative outcomes toward business under Carter, especially on labour law, taxation and business regulation. Its influence reached an initial peak in the first years of the Reagan

presidency, rewarded by the administration's massive pro-business tax cuts, and would grow continuously thereafter. By 1992, corporate and trade association PACs were contributing \$150 million, compared to \$44 million from labour. While corporate PACs allotted 60–65 per cent of their Senate campaign contributions to Republicans, the Democrats successfully exploited their incumbency in the House to secure 50 per cent of corporate monies there. (Non-incumbent Republicans received 10 per cent, compared to 5 per cent for non-incumbent Democrats.) The pattern of contributions from trade association PACs was even more favourable to the Democrats.<sup>22</sup> Meanwhile, the Democrats used their control of state legislatures to engage in widespread redistricting—i.e. gerrymandering—to allot themselves an estimated 25 extra seats beyond those merited by their vote.

Finally, few congressional Democrats hesitated to adapt, chameleon-like, to the ideological colouring of their districts, or to demonstrate their understanding of the corporate agenda; their attempt to outbid the Republicans by inserting further breaks for business into Reagan's 1981 tax bill constituted only the most salient example. In this the Democrats were assured that any campaign monies they lost in bending to the right would be more than compensated by the corporations. These tactics were not without risk. Over the longer term, the ultimate preference of the business community for the Republicans, combined with the Democrats' absence of a discernible political identity and their refusal to mobilize a base of working-class and poor voters, could leave the DP vulnerable, especially if the Republicans themselves found a better way forward. But as late as 1992 Democratic control of the House appeared unassailable; their majority in that year was just the same as in 1962, if below its peaks of 1964 and the mid-70s.

Of course, the agenda represented by this advantage had shifted far to the right. From 1992, the Clinton Administration attempted to construct a systematic programme for a longer-term Democratic majority under conditions of increasingly untrammelled capitalist preponderance. This involved a commitment to permanent austerity, consecrated in the ostentatious adoption of the balanced budget and pay-go spending rule. At stake was a decisive turn to neoliberal market opening, as

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<sup>22</sup> Gary Jacobson, 'Congressional campaigns', in Jacobson, *The Politics of Congressional Elections*, 6th edition, New York 2003, p. 65, Figure 4–2.



the centrepiece of a pro-business agenda oriented increasingly towards the financial community, and steadfastly opposed to any concessions on free-trade protection or labour-law reform. The black and working-class base was counted on to support the Democrats, come what may.

### *1994 and after*

The turning-point for the Republicans came in 1994 when, with the first Clinton Presidency floundering, they succeeded in capturing both houses of Congress. In a historic swing the Republicans gained 54 new seats, of which they retained 51 in 1996; 30 of these were from the South, representing a gain of over 50 per cent in the region.<sup>33</sup> In contrast to their Democratic predecessors of 1974 (and successors of 2006), the Republicans arrived with a radical programme for an assault on the New Deal–Great Society settlement. As well as the famous pledges to clean up congressional corruption, Newt Gingrich's 'Contract with America' called for cuts in welfare spending, 'fiscal responsibility' and tax limitations, capital gains cuts, repeal of tax hikes on Social Security benefits and increased defence funding, to 'maintain our credibility around the world'—'no US troops under UN command'. Crucially, control of Congress opened the floodgates of corporate funding for the Republicans. Hitherto, the Democrats' lock on Congress had allowed them to compete for business money on a fairly equal footing, as we have seen. But between 1994 and 2006, Republicans moved from virtual parity with the Democrats in corporate funding to overwhelming advantage: from a ratio of 1.14:1 to 1.6:1, or from 14 to 60 per cent.<sup>34</sup>

Republican control of Congress from 1994 shifted American politics significantly to the right. It enabled the GOP's militant cadre to push a reactionary domestic agenda and a hyper-imperialist international

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<sup>33</sup> Between 1960 and 1996, the number of Republican representatives from the South increased from 10 to 82 seats, or from 6 to 36 per cent of their total House delegation.

<sup>34</sup> Sector by sector, the ratio of Republican to Democratic corporate campaign contributions between 1994 and 2006 increased as follows: agribusiness, from 1.5:1 to 2.5:1; construction, from 1.5:1 to 2.5:1; defence, from 0.7:1 to 1.7:1; energy, from 1.3:1 to 3.2:1; health, from 1:1 to 1.8:1; transportation, from 1.3:1 to 2.6:1. The only sector in which the Democrats outdrew the Republicans was telecommunications, although in FIRE the Republican increase was relatively weak, rising only from 0.9:1 to 1.3:1, after peaking at 1.5:1 in 1996. See Center for Responsive Politics, [www.opensecrets.org](http://www.opensecrets.org).

perspective in a way hitherto impossible, intensifying the rightward 'triangulation' of Clinton's politics. His administration caved in to the Republicans on 'workfare' in 1996 and on the Taxpayers Relief Act of 1997. Defence spending was increased, and in 1998 Clinton signed on to regime change in Iraq and unleashed Operation Desert Fox.

At the same time, far-reaching changes were taking place in the real economy. There had always been a divergence between the aspirations of American capital, bent on internationalizing through foreign direct investment and overseas lending, and the needs of the industrial working class; as early as the 1950s, Democrats and Republicans alike had refused to protect a US steel industry under competitive assault from the Germans and Japanese. But during the boom era, the combination of American skill and wage levels enabled the US-based producers to defend the home market. Even as late as 1973, the manufacturing labour force was only slightly smaller than it had been in 1948—33.6 per cent compared to 35.7 per cent—as a proportion of the total private-sector labour force, measured in hours.

With the onset of chronic over-capacity in world manufacturing from the later 1960s, made worse by intensifying international competition, the domestic manufacturing labour force came under increasing pressure. Neither Republicans nor Democrats could contemplate with equanimity the collapse of the domestic manufacturing sector, however. During the subsequent two decades they sought to defend it through a combination of import limitation and, for most of the period, a low exchange rate. Between 1985 and 1995—thanks to the pressure exerted by Reagan, Bush and the first Clinton Administration on America's leading trading partners and rivals—a super-low dollar raised US manufacturing competitiveness and export growth rates to levels not seen since the 1950s, offering industrial workers a brief Indian summer in which the loss of manufacturing jobs was staunch.

But by the mid-90s the postwar economic order had given rise to new opportunities. Advanced technologies were creating international production chains that could select the highest-skilled, lowest-paid workers for each link in the process; China and Eastern Europe were opening up to highly profitable foreign direct investment; financial markets were increasingly deregulated; the US labour movement was a spent force. In these conditions, American multinational corporations and

finance capital were poised for a remarkable acceleration of globalized production and investment. In short order, the Clinton Administration approved the NAFTA, MFA for China and the WTO, while waving through the Telecommunications Act on behalf of its backers in Hollywood, the mass media and high tech.

Most decisive, however, for the shape of the American political economy was Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin's shift to the high dollar in 1995, quickly followed at the Federal Reserve by Greenspan's turn to asset-price Keynesianism to drive the economy. This was supplemented by the repeal of the Glass–Steagall Act, to permit combined operations across investment banking, commercial banking and insurance by financial giants like Citicorp. These measures served to blow up a historic equity-price bubble, quickly followed by an explosion of corporate finance through debt and stock issue. Foreign money poured into US assets. But meanwhile an ascending wave of imports, rendered cheaper by the high dollar and more plentiful by the Asian financial crisis, put intolerable pressure on American manufacturing. Between 1995–2005, beneath the glitzy surface of the 'new economy' and the later distractions of the 'war on terror', the manufacturing labour force was reduced by a fifth, while the financial sector expanded from about 25 per cent to 40 per cent of total corporate profits. American workers were left to sink or swim, with neither party offering a political solution.

### *September breakthrough*

Nevertheless, the shift to the right in the US remained limited in certain fundamental respects—a consequence of the electoral weight of the working class, however passive and disorganized it might be. Even as the corporations laid waste to workers' living standards and job conditions, the overriding concern of every president, from Nixon through Clinton, was to attract the votes of the white working class—especially its better-off, more conservative fraction, the so-called Reagan Democrats. Both parties had always assumed that the precondition for winning this pivotal layer was to retain the core New Deal programmes—Social Security, progressive taxation, and so forth. The Republicans had long aimed to break beyond this consensus. The 1994 capture of Congress had marked an important political advance for them. Ultimately, however, the Republicans had been stymied between 1994 and 2000 in fully realizing either their domestic or their foreign-policy goals. Remarkably,

as of 2000, neither the share of social expenditure in national income nor the effective rate of taxation on the top 5, 10 or 20 per cent of the population had been reduced, compared to 1980.<sup>25</sup>

As a consequence, these years constituted an era of growing frustration for the Republican right, even in the face of its undeniable political successes. It had not been able to break beyond the neoliberal consensus that had been consolidated under Bush Senior and Clinton. This was all the more galling in view of the deepening problems of profitability for large sections of the capitalist class, outside the financial sector—manifested in the continuation of corporate bankruptcy rates at near postwar highs, the steep decline of the non-financial corporate rate of profit after 1997, and the sharp recession of 2000–01. The underlying political problem was that the electorate remained so evenly divided. The popular vote for the House broke 49 to 49 per cent in 1996, 49 per cent Republican to 48 per cent Democrat in 1998, and 48 to 48 per cent in 2000. That year, Bush Junior was only able to squeeze into office with the help of the Supreme Court—and by concealing his agenda under the banner of ‘compassionate conservatism’. With the defection of Senator Jeffords in 2001, the Republicans lost control of the Senate. In late summer 2001, Bush was looking like a one-term president.

But 9/11 appeared to solve the Republican right’s domestic and foreign-policy problems at one blow. For five years, the ‘war on terror’ rallied Americans behind an aggressive militarist interventionism in the Middle East and distracted them from growing economic instability and inequality at home. In 2002, by focusing their campaign for Congress entirely on ‘terror’, the Republicans increased their plurality of the popular vote for the House to 51 per cent, compared to 46 per cent for the Democrats; it remained at 50 to 47 per cent in 2004. Again, the (white) Southern vote was crucial here.<sup>26</sup> With firm control of both the Presidency and both

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<sup>25</sup> Source: Congressional Budget Office.

<sup>26</sup> Of the Republicans’ eleven gains in House seats between 2000 and 2004, ten came from the South. In 1996, when Clinton defeated Dole, the white vote in the South for Dole exceeded that in the North by 7.5 per cent, 14.7 per cent and 17.2 per cent among white voters making less than \$30,000 per year, \$30,000–\$70,000 per year and above \$70,000 per year, respectively. But by 2004, when Bush defeated Kerry, the white vote in the South had gone a decisive distance further in a Republican direction, exceeding that in the North by 13 per cent, 17.5 per cent, and 19.7 per cent, respectively, for the same three income categories. I am indebted to Rachel Cohen for assembling these results from exit poll data and for her help in interpreting them.

Houses of Congress for the first time since the days of Eisenhower, the Republicans could unleash the pro-business agenda discussed above—one which had, only a few years before, seemed a political impossibility. For the time being at least, the Bush Administration had broken beyond the establishment consensus that had made for the de facto retention of the welfare-state core, progressive taxation and business regulation following the collapse of liberalism at the end of the 1970s.

In this sense, today's Republican right has also represented a break beyond postwar Republicanism, up to and including Reagan, in a double sense—its focus on directly attacking the New Deal–Great Society settlement, and its insistence on pushing for stepped-up military aggression, under conditions in which American geopolitical hegemony was already at a historic peak and the payoff for military interventionism on an extended scale appeared marginal. In terms of its programme and its central social base it has brought the agenda of Barry Goldwater, considered extremist in its time, into the US mainstream.

### *Towards 2008*

What are the prospects for this programme in the light of the Democrats' recapture of Congress in 2006, and improved prospects for the Presidency in 2008? As we have seen, the Republicans retain a large, stable—if not quite majoritarian—electoral base; a substantial advantage in corporate funding; and, whatever the tactical differences over immediate moves in Iraq, a relative unity around a clearly defined pro-business agenda. The swing to the Democrats has largely registered a protest vote, and perhaps an abstention by Republican loyalists unable to stomach the sex and sleaze scandals of 2006. In the run-up to 2008 the Republicans, unlike the Democrats, may find it harder to modify their programme in search of votes, especially in view of Bush's intransigence on Iraq; an inflexibility that may leave them particularly vulnerable. Yet the fact remains that in 2006 the Republicans survived what one GOP pollster called 'the worst political environment for Republican candidates since Watergate', and have some reason to hope for a significant rebound.<sup>27</sup>

Seen against the background of the rise of the Republican right—and in view of the enhanced position of the DLC and Blue Dog caucuses within

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<sup>27</sup> 'GOP Glum as it Struggles to Hold Congress', *New York Times*, 5 November 2006.

their new congressional majority—it seems likely that the Democrats will only accelerate their electoral strategy of moving right to secure uncommitted votes and further corporate funding, while banking on their black, labour and anti-war base to support them at any cost against the Republicans. This will mean further triangulation in domestic and foreign policy, but in a context significantly redefined to the right since the 1990s.

On Iraq, 29 of the Democrat candidates in the most fiercely contested congressional districts *opposed* setting a date for withdrawing US troops.<sup>28</sup> This was, of course, in line with the overall strategy of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, and Rahm Emanuel in particular.<sup>29</sup> Their aim is to attempt to capitalize on anti-war sentiment by doing the minimum necessary to differentiate themselves from the Republicans, while still appearing sufficiently hard-line on 'national security'. In line with this scientific opportunism, Carl Levin, Democrat chair of the Senate Armed Services Committee, put down a motion immediately after the election demanding that Bush *begin* redeploying troops at some unspecified date in the not too distant future, but neglecting to specify when, if ever, withdrawal should be completed. Leaving no doubt about their determination to tergiversate, House Democrats rejected Speaker Nancy Pelosi's candidate for House majority leader, the pro-withdrawal John Murtha, in favour of the declaredly anti-withdrawal Steny Hoyer.<sup>30</sup> The rebuke to Murtha–Pelosi will set the tone for the DP's approach to Iraq; this was underscored when Sylvestre Reyes, Pelosi's supposedly anti-war chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, on the morrow of his appointment, allowed that he could see the point in a 'surge' in troop levels in Iraq. Moreover, if the Cheney forces, and probably Israel, were to press for an assault on Iran before the end of Bush's term, the Democrats—not only the 'anti-war' Pelosi but proto-candidate Hillary Clinton—could find themselves to the right of the more cautious among Republicans.

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<sup>28</sup> Jim VandeHei and Zachary Goldfarb, 'Democrats Split Over Timetable for Troops', *Washington Post*, 27 August 2006.

<sup>29</sup> See John Walsh, 'Election 2006: How Rahm Emanuel Has Rigged a Pro-War Congress', *CounterPunch*, 14–15 October 2006.

<sup>30</sup> The *Washington Post* describes Hoyer as 'business-friendly . . . a free-trader and a balanced-budget proponent, with strong ties to lobbyists'. Shailagh Murray, 'Political Pragmatism Carried Hoyer to the Top', *Washington Post*, 17 November 2006.

With their substantial House majority, the Democrats possess the potential to bring about a major improvement in domestic policy, simply by not being Republicans; but what is the actual likelihood of this? Many congressional Democrats are already familiar with the rewards that can accrue from corporations if they play along with Bush. Since 2004, Democrat representatives have chalked up 34 votes for the Republicans' Energy Policy Act; 41 for their Estate Tax Relief Act; 50 for their Class Action Fairness Act; and 73 for their Bankruptcy Abuse Prevention and Consumer Protection Act. Even before the 2004 election the Democrats had voted to renew a number of Bush's tax cuts for big business, avowedly in exchange for the extension of 'middle-class' tax cuts.<sup>31</sup> There is no telling, therefore, what will happen when Bush pushes ahead with his plan to make the tax cuts permanent. While there has been much talk of a new populism in the wake of the Democrats' victory—with reason, since the electorate registered 53 per cent dissatisfaction with the socio-economic status quo—the possibility of any major new programmes on healthcare, education, public infrastructure or the impoverished cities has already been ruled out by the Democrats' commitment to the pay-go rule for government spending.

Meanwhile the Democrats have stepped up efforts to compete with the Republicans on corporate funding. In both 2004 and 2006, corporate money constituted more than half that raised by the DP, far surpassing any other source, and more than five times labour's contribution. Though lagging behind in other sectors, the Democrats do outdraw the Republicans in telecommunications, and far exceed them in the entertainment industry and high tech. Perhaps most impressive, they are competitive with the Republicans in raising money from the FIRE sector, the biggest corporate source of campaign finance, netting only 20–25 per cent less from this source than the Republicans in 2006. New House Majority leader Steny Hoyer has initiated his own K Street Project, his spokesperson declaring: 'We're not ceding ground to Republicans in the business community.' The new Senate Majority leader Harry Reid meets every two weeks with 'Democratic leaning' business lobbyists. The inevitable result is still greater pressure on the party to move towards the corporations and the right.

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<sup>31</sup> Jonathan Weisman, 'Congress Votes to Extend Tax Cuts', *Washington Post*, 24 September 2004.

The new majority in Congress is likely to disown, at least in part, the free-trade agenda. But here the horse has already left the barn, thanks mainly to the efforts of the Clinton Administration, from NAFTA on. In July 2005, Bush succeeded in pushing through the Central America Free Trade Agreement, thanks to an indispensable 15 Democratic defections, which made it possible for the Administration to neutralize 27 Republican no votes and eke out a narrow 217–215 victory in the House. On the other hand, the Doha Round, the major outstanding neoliberal initiative, is already dead in the water. Otherwise, the Democrats can be expected to complain loudly about China's undervalued exchange rate and its soaring trade surplus with the US. But once Congress has had a chance to think about the inevitable consequences of the yuan revaluation that they are calling for—namely, the reduction of Chinese purchases of US Treasury bonds and the entailed increase in US interest rates—they may temper their demands. The Democrats will no doubt evince a bit more sound, if not much fury in the run-up to the next election. But even if they go on to win in 2008, what we are surely in for, in the absence of a major revitalization of mass movements, is Clinton Redux—conceivably under Clinton II. In other words, a continuation of the long-term slide to the right, at perhaps a slightly slower pace than under the Republicans.

### *A political opening?*

The fact that the Democrats have remained contenders essentially by playing the Republicans' game raises the ultimate political conundrum. Between 2001 and 2006, real wages have been flat. Between 2000 and 2004—the last available data—median family income actually fell by between 2 and 3 per cent. Employment growth has been the slowest since World War II. There has been a big drop-off in employers' willingness to continue to pay for health-care insurance or to honour pensions, along with exacerbated inequalities in the distribution of wealth. In other words, the gap between the material aspirations of the population and what the bipartisan merry-go-round is prepared to provide has reached historic proportions for the post-World War II epoch. Why has the widely bruited new populism failed to become more pronounced?

Part of the answer is perhaps to be found in the bizarre operation of the economy that has emerged under Clinton and Bush, and the cushioning effects that this has offered, however temporary. For a long period,



ever-increasing female participation in the labour force countered declining male median real wages. After 1995, rising stock prices enabled corporations both to borrow with unprecedented ease and to issue shares at hugely inflated prices, allowing them to accelerate investment and unemployment. This created a hyper-boom that, however temporary and ill-fated, raised real wages dramatically over the four years between 1997–2001. That expansion proved illusory, issuing in a sharp if brief recession and a severe shortfall of demand. The next round of stimulus, provided by an epoch-making run-up in housing prices, made possible the greatest orgy of household-debt creation in US history, and, on that basis, a remarkable expansion of large-scale spending by wide swathes of the American consumerate.

Will the deflation of the housing bubble now in process finally make for a different outcome? There is not yet much on the horizon indicative of the sort of popular mobilization that is, as always, the precondition for any real progressive shift in US politics. But were the widely expected recession actually to materialize, things might get more interesting. The growing dissatisfaction with the war in Iraq, in combination with seriously worsening living conditions, would make for a combustible mix. Politics conducted without regard for the population would become a lot more difficult to sustain.



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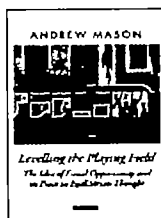
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GÖRAN THERBORN

## AFTER DIALECTICS

### *Radical Social Theory in a Post-Communist World*

**I**F SOCIALISM AND LIBERALISM have both been central to modern political and social thought, during the 20th century it was socialism, in a loose ecumenical sense, that was the most successful of the two in terms of intellectual attraction and public support.<sup>1</sup> Socialism was emblazoned on the banners of mass parties in Brazil, Britain, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Russia, South Africa—in fact, virtually every major country of the globe, with the exception of Nigeria and the US. It was embraced as a rhetorical goal, at least, by a range of locally powerful parties from Arctic Social Democrats to African nationalists. Socialism and Communism exercised a powerful attraction over some of the most brilliant minds of the 20th century: Einstein was a socialist, writing a founding manifesto for the American Marxist journal *Monthly Review*; Picasso was a Communist, who designed the logo of post-World War II Communist-led peace movements. In spite of its conservatively defined original task and its own staunchly conservative traditions, the Swedish Academy has allotted the Nobel Prize for literature to a series of left-wing writers, from Romain Rolland to Elfriede Jelinek.

Following two springtides in the aftermaths of the 20th century's world wars, varieties of socialism reached their maximum influence and transformational ambition in the 1960s and 1970s, as did its central, if not its sole, theoretical canon: Marxism. Geopolitically, the Soviet Union attained parity with the USA, which was defeated by the Vietnamese Communists. The Chinese Cultural Revolution was the largest-scale attempt at radical social change ever carried out, and was seen as a dazzling red beacon by many people all over the world. Africa north of the

Limpopo was swept by decolonization and embarked upon projects of socialist nation-building. In Latin America the Cuban Revolution inspired a hemispheric surge of revolutionary socialist politics, followed by another example, different but allied, in Chile.

Trade-union movements in the most developed countries reached their highest levels of affiliation in the mid-1970s. In Western Europe and the Oceanic Antipodes, Social Democracy was marching forward, both electorally and in its reform programme. In Sweden from 1968 to 1976, and in France between 1978 and 1981, Social Democrats presented their most radical concrete plans ever for social change. Militant working-class movements of strikes, demonstrations and workplace occupations shook France in May 1968 and Italy in the autumn of 1969. Student movements, which in Europe had historically been mainly right-wing, emerged as powerful leftist forces across Europe, the Americas, large parts of Africa from South Africa to Ethiopia and, more weakly, to the Arab North; in Asia from Istanbul to Bangkok and Tokyo, and in Oceania. Marx and Marxism pushed open the doors to the academy in some of the major capitalist countries, achieving a strong influence there, even if they were never hegemonic in any significant intellectual centre outside Italy and France.

Then, suddenly, the high water withdrew, and was followed by a neo-liberal tsunami. Socialist constructions were knocked down, many of them proving ramshackle or fake in the process; socialist ideas and Marxist theories were engulfed in the deluge. Privatization became the global order of the day, formulated in the Washington Consensus of the US Treasury, IMF and World Bank. At the dawn of the 21st century, not only liberal capitalism but empire and imperialism have staged a triumphant return, and with them the worldviews of the Belle Epoque. The explanation of this sudden turn, and why it happened in the last two decades of the 20th century, is a task far beyond the scope of this brief overview of the landscape of left social theory after the neoliberal 'disaster'. Some outline, however, must be given of the changing parameters

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<sup>1</sup> This text grew from an initial invitation to contribute to a collection on different aspects of European social theory, focusing on the question of 'Post-Marxism and the Left', and was later expanded for NLR. Any survey of a field as broad as this will be liable to omissions and oversights, as well as to the political, personal and generational inclinations of its author. A shorter, more Eurocentric version of this article appeared in Gerard Delanty, ed., *Handbook of European Social Theory*, London 2006.

within which such theorization has taken place, before providing a summary picture of responses.

## I. THE TURN OF MODERNITY

Whether its analysis tends towards celebration and acceptance, or critique and rejection, social theorization depends upon the social world it theorizes. A major reason for studying the present is to understand the power that it exercises, and critiques of it are largely, if not absolutely, dependent on the hope of a possible different world. Such hope, in turn, depends on the visibility, however faint, of some alternative power or force with a potential to carry the critique forward into active change. What happened to socialism and Marxism in the 1980s and 1990s was that the alternative forces appeared to melt away. While the inequalities of capitalism were increasing in most countries, while the global gap between rich and poor was widening, and while the brutality of the rulers of the main capitalist states was reaffirmed again and again, the dialectic of capitalism was imploding. Capital's new push was not accompanied by any strengthening of the working-class and anti-capitalist movements, nor by the opening of a systemic exit into another mode of production—at least not in perspectives visible to the naked eye. On the contrary: labour was weakened and embryonic systemic alternatives fell apart, or were completely marginalized. The global confluence of left-wing political defeats and social meltdowns in the last two decades of the 20th century was overwhelming, by any measure.

Any analytical assessment, however, has to take into account the slow working-through of time. Most contemporary theorists were actually formed during earlier conjunctures of hope and power. Existing theory still mainly registers the response of this preceding generation to the turn of the 1980s and 90s; at the same time, a new layer of leftists is emerging from the World Social Fora, the anti-globalization movement and the Indo-American mobilizations from Chiapas to Bolivia and beyond; while the socio-political meaning of the new Muslim anti-imperialism remains to be determined.

In the rich capitalist countries, the structural turn to deindustrialization and the mishandling by the centre-left of the difficult conjuncture of the 1970s—with both mass unemployment and soaring inflation—prepared

the way for the revenge of neoliberalism, spearheaded in industrialization's country-of-origin. When the new economic doctrine turned out to be an unexpectedly aggressive challenge, the main powers supposedly 'building socialism' adopted different strategies. That of the Soviet Union would prove suicidal: trying to placate political liberalism while letting the economy spiral downwards, by tolerating increasingly aggressive barracuda bites. The Chinese, and later the Vietnamese, took the 'free-market' road: if capitalism is the only show on earth, we are going to run it. After the failures and moral hollowness of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, the CCP—for all its former Maoist diatribes against 'capitalist roaders'—was the political force that most uniformly and dedicatedly took that route.

In Latin America, both reformist and revolutionary hopes had been quenched in blood by the end of the 1970s. In the Arab world, the successful Israeli attack in 1967 had shattered the secular left. African client states of Cold War Communism turned coats with the disappearance of their patrons. The huge Indonesian Communist Party had literally been massacred in 1965. Chilean Marxism, both Socialist and Communist, never recovered from the blow of 1973. In Europe, the PCI has dissolved itself, and the PCF has shrunk to the size of a large-scale sect. Elsewhere, West Bengal, an Indian state with a population the size of Germany's, has continued to re-elect its Communist government; and a Caribbean Castroism has managed to survive, revived by recent developments in Venezuela and Bolivia. Red banners are still kept flying by sizeable minorities in southern Europe, from Portugal to Greece, and by the largest party of Greek Cyprus, the moderate AKEL. But, perhaps with the exception of the latter, they are parties of testimony rather than of hope. The social-democratic aspirations of post-Communist Europe have come to little; its parties have tended to be either liberal, corrupt or both. Socialist hopes of post-apartheid South Africa have also come to nothing, although the ANC does provide an example of working democracy in Africa. The left-wing turn of Latin American countries in the 2000s owes little to classical socialist or Marxist thought, deriving more inspiration from radical Catholicism in the case of Brazil, from Latin American populism in Argentina and Venezuela, and from indigenous peoples' mobilization in Bolivia—although the Movement to Socialism of President Evo Morales was largely built by former cadres from the left-wing miners' union. Nevertheless, in each, and particularly in the Bolivian case, there is an articulate left-wing socialist component.



The world has not yet been made entirely safe for liberalism. New radical forces continue to emerge: populist movements in Indo-America, waves of migration throwing up immigrants' movements in the 'First World', and a whole gamut of political manifestations of Islam, from Islamist democracy to sectarian terrorism. The most interesting, crucial for coming developments, may be the advent of a social Islamism, comparable to the social Catholicism of Europe from the Netherlands to Austria a century ago. But the old maps of 'roads to socialism' have lost their bearings. New compasses of the left have to be made; it should be expected that this will take some time.

### *Marxism's broken triangle*

As a minimum framework for situating recent turns of left-wing social theory, we need to look at how Marxist and socialist thought have been embedded in cultural history. This entails, first, a look at the specific structuration of Marxism as an 'ism', and at the forces bearing upon that structure. Secondly, Marxism and socialism should be recognized as parts of a wider cultural ensemble, that of modernity, and therefore affected by the vicissitudes of the latter.

The history of Marxism may best be seen as a triangulation, growing out of both the historical situation and the extraordinary range of interests of its founding fathers. The 'ism' has three different poles, with varying distances to each other, not to mention varying pole-coalitions. Intellectually, Marxism was first of all a historical social science, in the broad Germanic sense of *Wissenschaft*, focused on the operation of capitalism and, more generally, on historical developments determined 'in the last instance' by the dynamics of the forces and relations of production. Secondly, it was a philosophy of contradictions or dialectics, with epistemological and ontological ambitions, no less than ethical implications. Thirdly, Marxism was a mode of politics of a socialist, working-class kind, providing a compass and road-map to the revolutionary overthrow of the existing order. The politics was the overdetermining apex of the triangle, making the 'ism' a social current, not just an intellectual lineage. Historical materialism, with the Marxian critique of political economy, and materialist dialectics, with the social philosophy of alienation and commodity fetishism, had their intrinsic intellectual attractions; but these were usually connected to sympathies with, and often commitment to, a socialist class politics. The relations of politics to science (and

historiography) or to philosophy, in Marx-ism, were always asymmetrical. If and when political leadership was differentiated from theoretical leadership, it was always political power which gained the upper hand; although political leadership among the first two generations after Marx usually required a capacity for theoretical argumentation.

Marx, Engels, Kautsky—the chief theoretician of the Social Democratic Second International—and Lenin, each in their own way, mastered all three genres. Stalin and Mao dabbled in all three, too. However impressive the intellectual-cum-political versatility and expertise of these founding generations, such qualities were also an expression of the early modernity of the late 19th century, with scarcely differentiated intellectual discourses, and the natural preponderance of politics. In the course of the 20th century, the length of the sides of the triangle would be increasingly extended. Any serious attempt at understanding ‘post-Marxism’ will have to deal with this triangle of social science, politics and philosophy.

The Marxism that emerged in Western Europe after the First World War was basically philosophical in approach; originally eschatologically connected to revolutionary politics (Lukács, Korsch, Gramsci), later on it either stood discreetly aloof from it (the Frankfurt School), or was only indirectly related to it (Althusser, Lefebvre, Sartre), even if linked by party membership as in the first two cases.<sup>2</sup> In spite of the hard sociological lessons of the Frankfurters in US exile, and of the scientist thrust of the Althusserians, European Marxist philosophers in this period hardly ever engaged intellectually with Marxist social scientists or historians.

A Marxist mode of politics never attracted enough support to become consolidated in Western Europe as a distinctive political practice. It was always open to opportunistic enterprise, and to authoritarian legitimation. This made what perhaps may be called the ‘natural’ Marxist coalition of politics and social science difficult and rare. There was, of course, one important link: the political commitment to socialism, in the historical sense of a different kind of society. In the 1960s, 70s, even in the early 80s, this was a commitment not only of radical intellectuals and youthful revolutionaries. It was professed by mass parties, or by significant currents within them, as in the British Labour Party and continental Western European Social Democracies. There was also the ‘actually existing’ fact

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<sup>2</sup> See Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism*, London 1976.

that a sizeable group of states, two of them very powerful, were 'building socialism'. Belief in their achievement was limited, but the view that they at least constituted an ongoing social construction site—although currently perhaps stagnant or even decaying—was widespread.

Socialist politics, in the ambiguous senses referred to, kept the Marxist triangle together, even if there was little in it of specifically Marxist intent. But socialist politics disintegrated in the course of the 1980s: bogged down and driven to surrender in France; electorally crushed in Britain and pushed onto the defensive in Scandinavia; abruptly turning right for geopolitical and other reasons in Southern Europe; abandoned or fatally undermined in Communist Eurasia; already crushed under the militarist boot in Latin America. This pulled the carpet from under Marxism as a social science, its analyses losing any discernible potential audience. Marxist philosophy, like historiography and social science, came to rely on academic positions. Perhaps because it was immune to empirical disproof, philosophy managed better, maintaining a link to marginal revolutionary politics, especially in parts of Latin Europe.

The Marxist triangle of social science, politics and philosophy has been broken—in all likelihood, irremediably. This is not to say that socialist politics, premised on claims for a different, socialist society, has disappeared. Where the electoral system allows its expression, support for such a politics oscillates between 5 and 20 per cent of the national vote; it may become much larger. Political ideologies and orientations have their ups and downs, and post-socialism may soon be overshadowed by some new socialism. But the underdevelopment of Marxist political theory, together with the social restructuration of capitalist societies, make it unlikely that an ascendant socialist politics would be very Marxist. The zenith of the industrial working class has passed, while many previously neglected political subjects are coming to the fore.

Under non-repressive conditions, Marx-ism is unlikely to exercise an attraction as *the* social science or historiography for post-1990s cohorts of committed socialist scholars. By the standards of physics or biology, the advances of social science and historical scholarship may look modest; they nevertheless represent enormous strides forward since the age of *Das Kapital*. Yet, since each generation of social scientists tends to find fresh sources of inspiration among the classics of social thought, it seems most likely that Marx will be rediscovered many times over in the

future; novel interpretations will be made and new insights found—but conducive to little *ism*-ish identification. Philosophers, on the other hand, are habitually, rather than occasionally, bent over their predecessors. Whether Marx will achieve the 2,500-year longevity of Plato, Aristotle and Confucius is an open question, but the possibility cannot be ruled out. A ghost never dies, as Derrida said.<sup>3</sup> The history of philosophy tends to generate ever new techniques of reading.

### *Challenge of postmodernity*

Left and Marxist social theory must also be situated within the broader cultural framework of modernity within which it was first articulated, and by whose vicissitudes it will inevitably be affected. The same period that saw the eclipse of political Marxism also witnessed the denial of modernity in the name of postmodernity, and the rise of postmodernism. The latter has at least two, very different origins.<sup>4</sup> One is aesthetic: a mutation of the modernist succession of avant-gardes, most clearly developed in the field of architecture, as a reaction against the austere High Modernism of Mies van der Rohe and the 'International Style'. The other source lies in social philosophy, a manifestation of ex-leftist exhaustion and disenchantment. The key figure here is the late French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard, a disillusioned former militant of the far-left grouplet *Socialisme ou Barbarie*.<sup>5</sup>

Why did postmodernism become such a formidable challenge? Why was postmodernity 'badly needed, intuitively longed for, and desperately sought', as an early devotee recently put it,<sup>6</sup> with the benefit of a more sceptical hindsight? The aesthetic attraction is easily understandable, above all as another manifestation of the relentless modernist drive for innovation; while its specific forms may be seen as influenced by opposition to its immediate predecessor/enemy, as well as by its socio-cultural context. But that does not take us very far with respect to the theoretical and political significance of postmodernism. Here, Jeffrey Alexander captured one salient point when he concluded that 'Postmodern theory ...

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<sup>3</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Spectres de Marx*, Paris 1993, p. 163.

<sup>4</sup> See the unrivalled critical archaeology of Perry Anderson, *The Origins of Postmodernity*, London 1998.

<sup>5</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *La condition postmoderne*, Paris 1979.

<sup>6</sup> Zygmunt Bauman and Keith Tester, *Conversations with Zygmunt Bauman*, Cambridge 2001, p. 71.

may be seen . . . as an attempt to redress the problem of meaning created by the experienced failure of "the sixties".<sup>7</sup>

At stake was a remarkable conflation of brilliance and myopia. In the cultural sphere, important changes had clearly taken place between the work of, say, Mies van der Rohe and Robert Venturi, or Jackson Pollock and Andy Warhol; changes emerging in the 1960s, and setting a new aesthetic tone for the next decades. Those developments warranted analyses of a new mode of cultural production, such as Fredric Jameson's *Postmodernism*.<sup>8</sup> But even the very best attempts at relating such cultural analysis to socioeconomic change never fully succeeded in articulating the connections between the two. Jameson bases his account on Ernest Mandel's *Late Capitalism*, a picture of the postwar world economy originating in the 1960s, and largely focused on the state regulation of capital and its insuperable limits.<sup>9</sup> This precluded discussion of a 'later' post-1975 capitalism, still less of the surge of a right-wing neoliberal modernism. Despite Jameson's seminal contributions, postmodernism was mainly an ex-left current, which mutated into a set of cultural-political attacks on modernity and the modern; a malaise within scholarly analytics.<sup>10</sup> Outside the specific audiences of architecture and art, it largely addressed the left and the ex-left, including feminism, and paid scant attention to the simultaneous rise of right-wing modernism, in the form of neoliberalism or assertive capitalism.<sup>11</sup>

Instead, postmodernism fed on the demoralization and uncertainty of the left in the aftermath of late 1960s and early 70s euphoria. Its critique of reason and rationality thrived on the 'machinery of images'

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<sup>7</sup> Jeffrey Alexander, 'Modern, Anti, Post, Neo', *NLR* 1/210, March–April 1995, p. 82.

<sup>8</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, London 1991.

<sup>9</sup> Ernest Mandel's *Late Capitalism* was published in English in 1975; its German edition appeared in 1972 from Suhrkamp. According to the author's preface, the main elements of the theory of late capitalism were conceived in 1963–67.

<sup>10</sup> See also Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, London and New York [1989] 2002; Pauline Marie Rosenau, *Post-Modernism and the Social Sciences*, Princeton 1991.

<sup>11</sup> Jameson himself scoffingly dismisses the doctrine's intellectual attractions: 'no one is going to persuade me that there is anything glamorous about the thought of a Milton Friedman, a Hayek or a Popper in the present day and age'; see Jameson, *A Singular Modernity*, London 2002, pp. 2–3.

of television society, which provided sustenance to academic 'cultural studies'.<sup>12</sup> There were, in addition, two further pillars of the new edifice of postmodernity. One was the social restructuring that followed from deindustrialization; an epochal social change. Another was the critique of modernist progress that arose from ecological concerns, which were intensified by the oil crises of the 1970s and early 80s. If environmentalism has found it hard to flourish in the esoteric ambience of postmodernist philosophizing, its adherents have nevertheless proved receptive to the latter. In sum, then, mass-communicated imagery, deindustrialization and ecological blowbacks provided a social echo chamber to the postmodernist discourse of (ex-)left disorientation. Against this background the modern, target of postmodernism's attacks, has been defined in a number of ways. Jameson's *Singular Modernity*, for example, while grimly noting recent 'regressions' from an earlier 'consensus' around 'full postmodernity', cites the asceticism of modernism, its phallocentrism and authoritarianism, the teleology of its aesthetic, its minimalism, its cult of genius, and 'the non-pleasurable demands' it made on the audience or public.<sup>13</sup>

But if postmodernism derived from the arts and from cultural philosophy, it has also claimed to speak about society, about culture in a more anthropological sense, and about history and the current historical situation of humankind. There is, then, an area of encounter and contest with contemporary historiography and social science. What might be the contribution from an analytical perspective of historiography and empirical sociology?

Obviously, there is no single 'correct' definition of modernity and the modern. But the most fruitful definitions of concepts taken from general language tend to be the least arbitrary and idiosyncratic ones, which usually implies a respect for etymological meaning and an abstention from loading the definition with aprioristic connotations. Modernity should thus be seen as a temporal orientation only. Modernity is a culture claiming to be modern, in the sense of turning its back on the past—the old, the traditional, the *passé*—and looking into the future as a reachable, novel horizon. Modern man/woman, society, civilization have

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<sup>12</sup> Anderson, *Origins of Postmodernity*, p. 88.

<sup>13</sup> Jameson, *Singular Modernity*, p. 1. But were asceticism, phallocentrism and authoritarianism really more characteristic of, and more universal in, modern than pre-modern cultures and societies?

a direction: 'forward'—or, as it was phrased in the old GDR, and in post-independence Ghana, 'Forward ever, backwards never'.<sup>14</sup> Rather than trivializing the concept of modernity by attempting to translate it into a set of concrete institutions, whether of capitalism or politics, or into a particular conception of rationality or the subject, for easy philosophical targeting, it is more useful to deploy it solely as a temporal signifier, in order to allow it to retain its analytical edge.

What would be the use of modernity—the German *Moderne*—in this sense? Why not follow Jameson's advice of 'substituting capitalism for modernity'?<sup>15</sup> Modernity is useful to many because of its broader, extra-economic connotations. A cultural history of, say, *Berliner Moderne* is hardly synonymous with a history of capitalism in Berlin, and not necessarily of illegitimate interest.<sup>16</sup> Modernity directs attention to important semantic shifts, otherwise easily neglected. Take the word 'revolution', for example. As a pre-modern concept it pointed backwards, 'rolling back', or to recurrent cyclical motions, as in Copernicus's *On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Spheres*, or in the French Enlightenment *Encyclopédie*, in which the main entry refers to clocks and clock-making. Only after 1789 did 'revolution' become a door to the future; as did, a little later, another re-prefix term: 'reform'.

As a historical concept, modernity also requires us to distinguish and analyse different routes towards it, with their enduring, if not unalterable, consequences. Four major roads to and through modernity may be discerned: the European one of civil war and internal conflict; the New World path of settlement, with its external pre-modern others—both the corrupt country of origin and the local natives; the traumatic road of colonial conquest and anti-colonial nationalism; and the 'reactive modernization' from above, pioneered by Japan. Finally, a time concept of modernity is also a way of grasping the significance of postmodernity,

<sup>14</sup> See Reinhart Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft*, Frankfurt 1979, pp. 314ff; Jürgen Habermas, *Der philosophische Diskurs der Moderne*, Frankfurt 1985, pp. 14–15.

<sup>15</sup> Jameson, *Singular Modernity*, p. 215.

<sup>16</sup> Nor should social modernism be equated with the postwar social theory of 'modernization', as Jeffrey Alexander proposed some years ago in these pages. Modernization was a particular socio-cultural theory of historical evolution, attacked by Wallerstein and others not from an 'anti-modern' position, but for its methodological nationalism and its rosy-idealist evolutionism, looking away from capitalism, exploitation, colonialism and 'the development of underdevelopment'. See Alexander, 'Modern, Anti, Post, Neo', *NLR* 1/210.

as a questioning of, a loss of belief in, the future narratives of the modern. In so far as 'forward' and 'backward', progressive and reactionary, have lost all meaning, we have entered a postmodern world.

Marx and Marxism were very much modern in this sense, invoking the term again and again in the *Communist Manifesto* and *Capital*, the 'ultimate purpose of which' was to 'disclose the economic law of motion of modern society', as Marx put it in his preface to the first edition of Volume One.<sup>17</sup> However, and this was crucial, it was a *dialectical* conception of modernity, seen as inherently contradictory. The modernity of capitalism and of the bourgeoisie was hailed, but at the same time attacked as exploitative and alienating. This dialectical understanding of modernity was, in a sense, the very core of Marxian thought. It affirmed the progressive nature of capitalism, of the bourgeoisie, even of capitalist imperialist rule (in ways that many would now find insensitive to the victims of colonialism), while at the same time not only denouncing them, but organizing the resistance against them. In broad cultural-historical terms, Marxism may be seen as Her Majesty Modernity's Opposition.<sup>18</sup> But if Marxism in this core cultural sense (and the recent challenges to it) can only be understood in terms of its dialectical conception of modernity, this latter also needs to be located in contradistinction to other important 'master narratives of modernity'. The most influential of these might be summarized as follows:

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TABLE I: *Master Narratives of Modernity*

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<i>The Past was</i>	<i>The Future will be</i>
Ignorance, superstition, subservience	Emancipation, rational, individual enlightenment
Oppression, unfreedom	Emancipation/liberation: collective
Poverty, disease, stagnation	Growth, progress, development
Conditions of no/less competition	Survival of the fittest
Rule-bound, imitative	Creative vitality

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<sup>17</sup> See Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air*, London 1983.

<sup>18</sup> See Göran Therborn, 'Critical Theory and the Legacy of Twentieth-Century Marxism', in Bryan Turner, ed., *The Blackwell Companion to Social Theory*, Oxford 1996.



To take these points in order: if, firstly, the Kantian notion of rational enlightenment has lost much of its appeal by the early 21st century, it should be recognized that it remains at the centre of such important controversies as, for example, how to explain, prevent and cope with HIV-AIDS and other lethal diseases in Africa and other parts of the world. Is witchcraft a major source of sickness and death? Is penetration of a virgin a cure for AIDS? Secondly: the concept of collective emancipation or liberation has undergone a remarkable mutation over the past few decades, as part of the process of postmodernization. It has largely lost its former social referents—the working class, the colonized, women, even gays and lesbians—and, above all, its earlier socialist horizons of emancipation from capitalism. But it has not disappeared. It re-emerges today in militant liberal-democratic discourse, itself a form of right-wing modernism, where it now refers to liberation from a select group of ‘anti-Western’ authoritarian regimes: Communist, post-Communist, or Muslim and Arab. In Indo-Latin America, on the other hand, emancipation has acquired a new social urgency, as indigenous populations raise demands for a more equitable division of resources.

Thirdly, horizons of growth and progress still govern the expectations of all modern economies, erstwhile ‘constructions of socialism’ as well as every variety of capitalism, including the reigning neoliberalism. Growth and progress also constitute the continuing story that science tells of itself, and form the creed of all contemporary academic authorities. Fourthly, the survival of the fittest and Social Darwinism have been given a new impetus by neoliberal globalization, after their post-Fascist quarantine. According to this view, only the fittest and the meanest will deserve to survive the free-for-all of global competition. And finally, the collapse of rule-bound artistic academicism has left artistic modernism without a target, other than older modernists. The modern conflict of avant-garde and tradition has been replaced by a succession of fashions.

Marx harboured all the above modern perspectives, although collective human emancipation and economic development were most central to him. However, what distinguished Marx and Marxism from other strands of modernist thought was a focus on the contradictory character of the modern era, and on these contradictions and conflicts as its most important dynamics.

TABLE 2: *Marxian Dialectics of Capitalist Modernity*

<i>Advance</i>	<i>Contradiction/Conflict</i>
Individualization	Atomization, alienation
Productivity development	Exploitation and distributive polarization Outgrowing existing relations of production
Capitalist extension	Proletarian unification and strengthening
Globalization	Anti-imperialist revolts

Against the linear liberal projects of individualization, rationalization and growth as the bases for 'modernization', Marxism set a dialectical perspective of emancipation—explicitly affirming that capitalism and colonialism were forms of exploitation as well as progress. The Marxist perspective also differed from the Weberian notion of the rationalization of markets and bureaucracies as an 'iron cage'. The contradictions of modernity, according to Marx, were harbingers of radical change. The labour movement in capitalist countries, the socialist-feminist movement, the anti-colonial liberation movements and 'actually existing' socialist countries, whatever their faults, were seen as carriers of a different future, of a modernist project of emancipation. That belief in the future had been fundamentally shattered by the 1990s.

Postmodernism attacked all the grand narratives of modernity, while usually ignoring the dialectic conception of Marxism. But all its socio-political advances, all its conquests of ideological space, were against the modernist left. At the same time, right-wing modernism defeated almost all its traditionalist conservative rivals, most successfully in Thatcher's Britain; for neoliberalism may be seen as a high modernism of the right and, as noted, it has scarcely been dented by postmodernist arguments. The reinvigorated American right is a vivid illustration of the current entanglements of modernity.<sup>19</sup> While recruiting its storm troopers from Christian fundamentalists, the hegemonic tenor of the American right is its 'willingness to embrace the future', which it sees as its own.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> See Göran Therborn, 'Entangled Modernities', *European Journal of Social Theory*, vol. 6, no. 3, 2003.

<sup>20</sup> John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge, *The Right Nation*, London 2004, pp. 346ff.

(The theological celebration of worldly success by mainstream Christian Evangelicalism facilitates, of course, this powerful brew of secular modernism and religious fundamentalism.) Significantly, while the left commitment to social revolution has been silenced or muted, the American right is trumpeting 'regime change'.

Modernity has not been abandoned as an intellectual position. It has been defended by theorists both from the 'Third Way' and from the old far left.<sup>21</sup> In a well-funded research and publishing programme at Suhrkamp, Ulrich Beck has gone so far as to proclaim a 'second modernity'. But the socio-political challenge across the whole left-right spectrum has scarcely begun to be confronted. In fact, Beck's *Risk Society*, first published in Germany in 1986 and a major theoretical work of the last decades, did provide a possible basis for a new conception of modernity: 'Risk may be defined as a systematic way of dealing with hazards and insecurities induced and introduced by modernization itself. Risks . . . are politically reflexive.'<sup>22</sup> This is an important societal conceptualization—risk being a key concept of economics—that also found a political resonance in environmental circles. However, the critical edge of *Risk Society* is blunted by two features: first, its basic blindness to what was happening on the right-of-centre of the political scale, the rise of right-wing liberal modernism—initially less strong in Germany than in the Anglo-Saxon world, but politically triumphant well before its enthronement in the *Grosse Koalition*. Second, the specific institutional content of Beck's 'new', later 'second', modernity—the demise of class, full employment, the nation-state; the 'release' of individuals from industrial institutions—lays his perceptive grasp of a changed time-frame open to charges of arbitrary selectivity, empirical unreliability, or both.

Postmodernist discourse has something important to teach, but it should be subjected to a symptomatic rather than a literal reading, as a questioning of non-dialectic conceptions of modernity, as a symptom of the disorientation of the (ex-)left, and as a form of myopia towards the world beyond the North Atlantic. The postmodernization of the world remains very uneven. At the frenzied pace of aesthetic discourse, postmodernism

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<sup>21</sup> See for example Habermas, *Der philosophische Diskurs der Moderne*; Alex Callinicos, *Against Postmodernism*, Cambridge 1989; Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens and Scott Lash, *Reflexive Modernization*, Cambridge 1994; Terry Eagleton, *The Illusions of Postmodernism*, Oxford 1996

<sup>22</sup> Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society*, London 1992, p. 21, italics omitted.

may even be 'over', as one of its former publicists put it in a second-edition epilogue.<sup>23</sup> In 2002 Jameson noted the end of the postmodern 'general agreement', and 'in the last few years . . . the return to and the re-establishment of all kinds of old things'.<sup>24</sup> Bauman, in advanced age still tuned to the shifting sirens of the times, has turned to peddling 'liquid modernity' instead of postmodernity.<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, the two decades of postmodernism, the 1980s and 90s, produced a rift in cultural social thought, itself a symptom of the politico-economic times, which has not been overcome. The future as novelty, as difference, disappeared behind a smokescreen.

While ecological and feminist critiques of modernist visions of growth, development and progress have become significant side-currents in the centres of capitalism—often incorporated, in diluted forms, into the mainstream of enlightened liberalism—Third World critiques of what we may, with a bow of respect to the Peruvian social theorist Aníbal Quijano, call the coloniality of modernity, or the coloniality of anti-colonial nationalism, have hardly penetrated the walls of North Atlantic social theory. This has always been an important theme in Indian thought, if usually in some uneasy, though functioning, alliance with modernist nationalism, exemplified in the cooperation of Gandhi and Nehru. At the Mumbai Social Forum in 2004, there was a main-stage banner proclaiming 'People Do Not Want Development, They Just Want to Live'. This made some sense to the many recent Indian social movements pitting local, often 'tribal' people and ecologists against modern dam and other developmentalist projects. Seen alongside the terrible Mumbai slums, the attack on developmentalism appears less convincing.

However, in a country like Bolivia, the coloniality of modernity is more palpable, in the country's long post-independence history of racist politics and projects of economic and cultural 'modernization' that left the indigenous majority out in the cold poverty of the *altiplano*. The platform of the current elected leadership of Bolivia, of President Evo Morales and Vice-President Álvaro García, is neither traditionalist, modernist, nor postmodernist. Intellectually as well as politically impressive, it is a bold attempt at clearing a path to an alternative modernity, blazing a new trail for Marxism in the Andes.

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<sup>23</sup> Hutcheon, *Politics of Postmodernism*, p. 166.

<sup>24</sup> Jameson, *Singular Modernity*, p. 1

<sup>25</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, Cambridge 2000.

In summary, we may say that modernity turned at the end of the 20th century, but in several directions: to the right; into postmodernism; and into theoretical and political searches for new modernities.

### *Definitions*

Having laid out the broader political and cultural-intellectual parameters of recent social theorizing, there remains a further preliminary question to be asked before we move on to consider the current shape of the field: what is social theory? The definition deployed here sees social theory as strung between two ambitious poles: on the one hand, providing a comprehensive explanatory framework for a set of social phenomena; and on the other, something 'making sense of' such phenomena. In other words, this is an ecumenical conception of 'theory' that applies both to explanation, the more wide-ranging the more important, and to *Sinnstiftung*, the constitution of meaning.

In terms of the 'sense-making' pole, the later salience of philosophy in the classical Marxist triangle of social science, philosophy and politics, and the former's far greater resilience to empirical developments, mean that the contributions of political and social philosophy are of particular importance to an overview of recent social theory emanating from the left. In terms of the second pole, that of empirical social science, it should perhaps be reiterated that theory is not a separate field or a sub-discipline, a form of research-free armchair thinking, but the guiding compass of empirical investigation. It was in these terms that Pierre Bourdieu, for instance, criticized current Anglo-Saxon conceptions of social theory.<sup>26</sup> Attention will also be given to that kind of theory in scientific action.

It should be underlined at the outset that what follows is by no means a general survey of the intellectual production of the contemporary left. A strict definition of social theory, centred on the present, must exclude the work of historians and scholars of intellectual history, and thereby some of the most gifted minds of the international left. Another fruitful area for the left during recent years has been that of geopolitics and inter-state relations, yielding important new work on

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<sup>26</sup> See Pierre Bourdieu, *Réponses*, Paris 1992, pp. 86, 136ff.

imperialism and imperial power; but again, this involves little social theorizing as such.<sup>27</sup>

The challenges to left-wing social thought posed by postmodernity and by the neomodern right have been met in very different ways. Disregarding cases of actual flight from radical thought, which fall outside the scope of this article, I will first track new thematics in the responses of left-of-centre scholars, and then attempt to locate some of the general shifts in their theoretico-political positionings. Since restrictions of space permit neither lengthy expositions nor elaborate analyses of these variations, I have opted for an area road-map, mainly restricted to Western Europe and North America.

## II. MODES OF LEFT RESPONSE—THEMATICS

### *Europe's theological turn*

The most surprising theoretical development in left-wing social philosophy in the past decade has been a new theological turn. In the main, this has not meant an embrace of religious faith, although some former left-wing intellectuals have come to affirm an ethno-religious Jewishness, and there is often an indication of a particular personal relation, beyond belief, to religion or to a religious figure—as when Régis Debray writes: 'Three things have occupied my life [as a thinker], war, art and religion'.<sup>28</sup> Rather, the theological turn has manifested itself in a scholarly interest in religion, and in a use of religious examples in philosophical and political argumentation.

The principal work here is that of Debray who, in *Le feu sacré* (2003) and *God: An Itinerary* (2004), has turned his literary talents to original scholarly investigations into the structures of the Judeo-Christian narratives, the religious 'procedures of memorization, displacement and organization', and the re-lit fires of religion around the world.<sup>29</sup> Debray, however, had first developed these themes in his *Critique of Political Reason*

<sup>27</sup> The yearbook *Socialist Register* has been a central focus in this field, publishing work by, among others, Aijaz Ahmad, Noam Chomsky, Sam Gindin, Peter Gowan, David Harvey, Colin Leys, Leo Panitch, John Saul, Bob Sutcliffe and Ellen Wood.

<sup>28</sup> Régis Debray, *Le feu sacré*, Paris 2003, p. 7.

<sup>29</sup> Régis Debray, *God: An Itinerary*, London and New York 2004, p. 6.

(1981/1983), considerations on the religious unconscious in politics and political forms of the sacred; having begun his adult religious studies with a biography of the 11th-century Pope Gregory VII while imprisoned as a revolutionary *guerrillero* in the small Bolivian town of Camiri, where Christian texts were the only non-censored reading matter.<sup>30</sup>

Alain Badiou, a former Maoist and still an active far-left militant as well as a philosopher, also refers to an old, poetic and personal relationship to Saint Paul, to whom he turns in his 'search for a new militant figure . . . called upon to succeed the one installed by Lenin'. Badiou's apostle supposedly laid the 'foundations of universalism' in his letter to the Galatians: 'There is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female'.<sup>31</sup> Slavoj Žižek, for his part, elaborates the parallels between Paul and Lenin into three pairs of guides: Christ/Paul, Marx/Lenin and Freud/Lacan. But his main point in *On Belief* (2001) is to argue the authentic ethical value of unconditional belief—political rather than religious—making no compromises and including what Kierkegaard called 'the religious suspension of ethics'. The ruthlessness of Lenin and of radical religious fundamentalists is thus presented as admirable. The Book of Job has also become a topic of fascination for Žižek, as 'perhaps the first modern critique of ideology'.<sup>32</sup> Meanwhile in *Empire*, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri hold out as an illumination of 'the future life of communist militancy' the milder religious example of Saint Francis of Assisi.<sup>33</sup> In his own sober way Jürgen Habermas has also paid his respects to religion:

As long as no better words for what religion can say are found in the medium of rational discourse, it [communicative reason] will . . . coexist abstemiously with the former, neither supporting it nor combating it.<sup>34</sup>

Habermas has gone even further, accepting claims that his conception of language and of communicative action 'nourishes itself from the legacy of Christianity'.<sup>35</sup> 'For me, the basic concepts of philosophical ethics . . .

<sup>30</sup> Régis Debray, *Critique of Political Reason*, London 1983, pp. 7ff.

<sup>31</sup> Galatians 3: 28, quoted in Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, Stanford 2003, p. 9.

<sup>32</sup> Slavoj Žižek and Glyn Daly, *Conversations with Žižek*, Cambridge 2004, p. 161.

<sup>33</sup> Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*, Cambridge, MA 2000, p. 413.

<sup>34</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *Religion and Rationality*, Cambridge, MA 2002, p. 24.

<sup>35</sup> Habermas, *Religion and Rationality*, p. 160.

fail to capture all the intuitions that have already found a more nuanced expression in the language of the Bible.’<sup>36</sup>

When the Soviet Union was crumbling, the German Marxist philosopher Wolfgang Fritz Haug, a dedicated admirer of Gorbachev’s attempts at reform, sat down to read Augustine’s *City of God* in its original Greek—that is to say, a great theologian’s reflections on the fall of Rome.<sup>37</sup> The same work is also referred to by Hardt and Negri, who with typical stylistic acrobatics cast the Church Father together with the early 20th-century American Wobblies (‘From this perspective the IWW is the great Augustinian project of modern times’).<sup>38</sup> This widespread fascination with religion and religious examples, mainly Christian, may be taken as an indicator of a broad cultural mood, for which postmodernity appears a good label. As an alternative future disappears or dims, roots, experience and background become important. A classical European education, a maturation in a non-secular milieu, and a middle age at a safe distance from any demands of faith, make Christianity a natural historical experience to look at.

### *American futurism*

In the much more religious US, no comparable left theological turn is visible. There the Bible has been more or less monopolized by the right, although the Afro-American left still has powerful political preachers, like Jesse Jackson, and theologian-intellectuals like Cornel West, self-characterized as a ‘Chekhovian Christian’.<sup>39</sup> While European leftists are referring to Christian icons of the past, their American comrades are peering ever further into the future—short-term prospects never having looked very rosy for the North American left. Yet among some of its best minds, expectations for the future have survived both the postmodernist onslaught and the collapse of Communism, and have asserted themselves in a new futurism. It has two remarkable currents, the most striking of which is a new utopianism, and the second a systemic apocalypitics.

In the last decade, a variety of American radical thinkers have turned their critical intelligence and creative energies to Utopia. While waiting

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<sup>36</sup> Habermas, *Religion and Rationality*, p. 162.

<sup>37</sup> Haug, personal communication.

<sup>38</sup> Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, p. 207.

<sup>39</sup> George Yancy, ed., *Cornel West: A Critical Reader*, Oxford 2001, p. 347.



for new forms of political agency to emerge, 'there is no alternative to Utopia', as Fredric Jameson has put it in a masterly contribution to the field, analysing utopian fantasy and utopian writing with his characteristic critical brilliance, erudition and galactic range of associations.<sup>40</sup> Utopia serves a vital political function today, Jameson emphasizes, 'in that it forces us precisely to concentrate on the [Utopian] break itself: a meditation on the impossible, on the unrealizable in its own right'.<sup>41</sup>

Jameson is only the most recent exponent in a spectacular arc of creative American utopianism, of which he stands at one pole, focusing on the utopian 'desire', its 'disruption' of the future and its literary form, above all science fiction. In quite another register, the sociologist Erik Olin Wright launched the 'Real Utopias Project' in the early 1990s, a large-scale collective enterprise of radical drawing-board social engineering and of formalized normative economics; a 'sub-genre' different from Jameson's, but not as much as their contrasting styles and references may suggest. Both are fascinated by utopian imagination, one as an analyst of science *fiction*, the other as a writer and promoter of (social) *science fiction*. So far, the Real Utopias Project has produced five books, while Wright himself is writing an ambitious strategic conclusion that proposes an understanding of socialism 'as an alternative to capitalism, as a process of social empowerment over state and economy', which will be published as *Envisioning Real Utopias*.<sup>42</sup>

Despite its impressive scale, and defiant stand against the headwind of the times, the design of the project may look somewhat odd, particularly to northwestern Europeans. The economic sections are classically utopian in their abstract evocations of a good society and general abstention from strategic thinking about how existing society can be changed. But they are, on the other hand, often remarkably modest, perhaps even

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<sup>40</sup> Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future*, London 2006, p. xii.

<sup>41</sup> Jameson, *Archaeologies*, p. 232.

<sup>42</sup> Joshua Cohen and Joel Rogers, eds, *Associations and Democracy*, London 1995; John Roemer, ed., *Equal Shares: Making market socialism work*, London 1996; Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, eds, *Recasting Egalitarianism: New Rules of Accountability and Equity in Markets, States and Communities*, London 1998; Archon Fung and Erik Olin Wright, eds, *Deepening Democracy: Institutional innovations in empowered participatory governance*, London 2003; Bruce Ackerman, Anne Alstott and Philippe Van Parijs, eds, *Redesigning Distribution*, London 2006; Erik Olin Wright, 'Compass Points', *NLR* 41, Sept–Oct 2006.

over-modest, in their targets. Thus John Roemer, for instance, presents an ingenious scheme for coupon socialism, a market society where property rights are invested in the adult citizenry holding coupons. At the same time, he finds the already existing Nordic redistribution by taxation too radical to emulate: 'I doubt that large heterogeneous societies will, in our lifetime, vote to redistribute income as much through the taxation system as the Nordic societies have.'<sup>43</sup> In another volume, devoted to basic income schemes and to 'stakeholder grants' for all young adults, a critical voice (also American) finds from a comparison with actually existing Sweden: 'The fully developed welfare state deserves priority over Basic Income because it accomplishes what Basic Income does not: it guarantees that certain specific human needs will be met.'<sup>44</sup> As utopianism, the political aspect of the project is more innovative in that it presents and discusses, theoretically and in different voices, four actually existing experiments with local participatory democracy, ranging from Chicago to West Bengal.<sup>45</sup>

The geographer and urban historian David Harvey, now based in New York, has also attempted a bold 'dialectical utopianism' in *Spaces of Hope* (2000). Its proposed transcendence of the 19th-century gap between Marxian historical dialectics and utopia constructions may not convince everybody who is in principle sympathetic. While US-centred globalization may be in 'disarray', discrepancies between ideological promises and economic delivery, or 'difficulties' created by market externalities, hardly constitute contradictions in the Marxian sense of structural interdependencies-cum-incompatibilities.<sup>46</sup> However, theoretical 'correctness' is a minor point here. Harvey, who still proudly teaches Marx's *Capital*, presents some interesting utopian principles for an 'insurgent architect at work', and an appended Bellamy-inspired utopian walk through Baltimore in 2020, self-critically reflected upon.<sup>47</sup> Central European Marxism once, in its darkest hours, produced a singular

<sup>43</sup> John Roemer, 'A Future for Socialism', in Roemer, ed., *Equal Shares*, p. 37.

<sup>44</sup> Barbara Bergmann, 'A Swedish-Style Welfare State or Basic Income? Which should have priority?', in Ackerman et al., *Redesigning Distribution*, p. 141.

<sup>45</sup> See Fung and Wright, eds, *Deepening Democracy*.

<sup>46</sup> David Harvey, *Spaces of Hope*, Edinburgh 2000, pp. 193–4.

<sup>47</sup> From the rich North American fascination with utopias, one should also take note of the 2000 issue of the annual *Socialist Register* on 'Necessary and Unnecessary Utopias', and the captivating 20th-century history of East–West utopias and their passing, Susan Buck-Morss's *Dreamworld and Catastrophe*, London 2000.

masterpiece on utopian thinking and 'anticipatory consciousness', Ernst Bloch's three-volume *Principle of Hope*, published in Germany in 1954 but written much earlier. In the current context, however, the genre has not been flourishing on the eastern side of the Atlantic.

In the 1990s, when most people discussing 'transitions' were thinking about the Eastern European shift from socialism to capitalism, the message came from Binghamton, New York, that the world was in fact in passage from capitalism to something else, the character of which was still uncertain. 'We are living in the transition from our existing world-system, the capitalist world economy, to another world-system or systems', Immanuel Wallerstein proclaimed in *Utopistics*, a work which defined its aim as 'the sober, rational and realistic evaluation of human social systems, the constraints on what they can be, and the zones open to human creativity.'<sup>48</sup>

Giovanni Arrighi, then also at Binghamton, ran a parallel research project, reaching similar if yet more dramatic conclusions. From his reading of world-system history, Arrighi saw three possible outcomes to the 'ongoing crisis of the US regime of accumulation'.<sup>49</sup> Firstly, that the 'old centres' terminate capitalist history 'through the formation of a truly global world empire'; secondly, that a new guard arises but lacks the necessary 'state- and war-making capabilities', whereupon 'capitalism (the "anti-market") would wither away'; and thirdly, that 'capitalist history would . . . come to an end' by being burnt up 'in the horrors (or glory) of escalating violence'. A crucial element of the world-system, in this view, is the role of its economic-cum-political hegemon. The current incumbent, the United States, has been in irreversible decline since the 1970s. As in the past, the current financial expansion of capitalism is an expression of, and vehicle for, a profound crisis of existing world-system hegemony. Capitalism is threatened from two sides: by a long-term strengthening of the power of workers—through global deruralization and proletarianization—and by the weakening of states, and their capacity for capital protection and social mediation; a result of the

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<sup>48</sup> Immanuel Wallerstein, *Utopistics*, New York 1998, pp. 35, 1–2. A collective research project had already summarized the character of the times in the same terms: see *The Age of Transition: Trajectory of the World-System 1945–2025*, co-ordinated by Terence Hopkins and Immanuel Wallerstein, Atlantic Heights, NJ 1996.

<sup>49</sup> Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century*, London 1994, pp. 355–6.

discrediting and delegitimation of state reformism (what Wallerstein calls 'liberalism').

According to Wallerstein, the principal mechanism by which capitalists have been able to limit the 'political pressure' caused by the secular historical trend towards increasing working-class strength, through democratization and other channels, has been 'the relocation of given sectors to other zones of the world economy that are on the average lower-wage areas'. But 'the problem today is that, after five hundred years, there are few places left to run to'.<sup>50</sup> Wallerstein is here giving a new twist to Rosa Luxemburg's 1913 argument about the breakdown of capitalism: 'capitalism needs non-capitalist social organizations as the setting for its development, [but] it proceeds by assimilating the very conditions which alone can ensure its existence'.<sup>51</sup> Luxemburg was then thinking about non-capitalist areas as necessary export markets and providers of cheap foodstuffs.

None of the theses has attracted any wide agreement, even on the left, in spite of the general intellectual respect for their authors. The most tangible argument, but hardly the most convincing, is the proposition that a scaling down of US power after its peaking meant a systemic crisis of world capitalism. Later formulations by Arrighi have been much less apocalyptic, and a post-American hegemony has become more plausible with the continuing rise of China and the emergence of India as a major player. While the overpowering historical importance of a relay race of capitalist hegemony is still assumed—from Fernand Braudel—rather than unassailably argued, to the not (yet) convinced, the comparative work by Giovanni Arrighi and Beverly Silver, *Chaos and Governance in the Modern World System* (1999) on hegemonic transitions concludes with a set of plausible propositions about the likely implications of a new shift, without predicting any necessary termination of capitalism.<sup>52</sup> Wallerstein sticks to his long-term transition perspective, but his analytical light seems to have become concentrated on the global geopolitics

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<sup>50</sup> Wallerstein, *The Decline of American Power: the us in a Chaotic World*, London 2003, pp. 59, 228.

<sup>51</sup> Rosa Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital*, London [1913] 1963, p. 446.

<sup>52</sup> See Arrighi's discussion of Robert Brenner and David Harvey in 'Tracking Global Turbulence', NLR 20, March–April 2003; 'Hegemony Unravelling—1', NLR 32, March–April 2005; 'Hegemony Unravelling—2', NLR 33, May–June 2005.

of the next twenty years, rather than on systemic extinction.<sup>53</sup> In comparable vein, the Egyptian economist Samir Amin's recent *Beyond US Hegemony?* (2006) is a sober global analysis with a pragmatic left-wing geo-strategic programme. The final step from the capitalist world-system to geopolitics and geo-economics has been taken only by the late Andre Gunder Frank, throughout his life a scholarly heretic and iconoclast: 'best forget about it [capitalism] and get on with our inquiry into the reality of universal history'.<sup>54</sup>

### *Displacements of class*

Class, formerly among the most important concepts in left discourse, has been displaced in recent years; in part, ironically, through the latter's own defeat in capitalist class struggle, but also because the developments of post-industrial demography have dislodged it from its previous theoretical or geographical centrality. Class persists, but without a secure abode, and with its philosophical right to existence contested. Its social appearance has become almost unrecognizable after being dropped into an acid of pure politics, as in the political philosophy of discursive hegemony developed by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1985), arguably the most intellectually powerful contribution of post-Marxist political theory. Thus for example Laclau dismisses Slavoj Žižek's invocation of class and the class struggle as 'just a succession of dogmatic assertions'.<sup>55</sup> 'Antagonism' becomes the new central concept.

Laclau's political philosophy has been further developed in his recent *On Populist Reason* (2005), which brings together his old interest in Peronism and Latin American populism, his post-Marxist political philosophy, and a newer immersion in Lacan. A heavy read at times, as a philosophy it fails to provide any tools for analysing actual processes of social mobilization or explaining different outcomes, whether in terms of 'people' or of 'class'. Its contact with the extramural world is through selected illustrations only. On the other hand, beyond the *Streit der Fakultäten* there is much in Laclau's work that rewards efforts to penetrate the sometimes

<sup>53</sup> For example see Wallerstein, 'Entering Global Anarchy', *NLR* 22, July–August 2003 and 'The Curve of American Power', *NLR* 40, July–August 2006.

<sup>54</sup> Andre Gunder Frank, *ReOrient*, Berkeley 1998, p. 352.

<sup>55</sup> See Laclau, 'Structure, History, and the Political', and Žižek, 'Class Struggle or Postmodernism? Yes Please', in Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau and Slavoj Žižek, eds, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality*, London 2000.

dense veil of jargon. While peoples and other social forces cannot be constructed at random—limits which a philosophy of social ‘logics’ has difficulties coping with—it is important to bear in mind that, as Laclau points out, they are all, classes included, discursively mobilized, and that the success or failure of this mobilization is contingent; that social change brought about by resistance or insurrection has an irreducible political moment, of articulation and leadership; and that popular mobilizations of the excluded, the exploited or the underprivileged can take different forms, including Fascist ones.

Etienne Balibar, once Althusser’s star pupil, has stayed closer to the Marxist tradition. His important 1987 essay, ‘From the class struggle to the struggle without classes?’, republished in 1997, did not answer its own question in any clearly post-Marxist mode. While stressing the wider ‘universality of antagonism’, Balibar also concluded that ‘The class struggle can and should be thought as *one* determining structure, covering *all* social practices, without being the *only one*’.<sup>56</sup>

To the recent philosophy of struggle without classes corresponds the sociology of classes without struggle. Class is well established, largely thanks to the analytical edge and empirical tenacity of John Goldthorpe, as a central concept of inter-generational mobility studies, which have become a technically advanced but intellectually isolated sub-discipline. As a category of distribution, class retains its place in sociology. Standard American sociological discourse on distribution and inequality always refers to ‘class, gender and race’, in alphabetical and in non-alphabetical orders. A major US journal on public health, admittedly with a Spanish editor (Vicente Navarro) based at Johns Hopkins, *The International Journal of Health Services*, pays persistent, systematic attention to class dimensions of (ill) health and mortality.

There is as yet no global class analysis corresponding to the many national class maps produced by Marxists of the 1960s and 70s, and these earlier pictures may well be seriously challenged.<sup>57</sup> The re-articulation of class

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<sup>56</sup> Etienne Balibar, *La crainte des masses*, Paris 1997, p. 242, emphasis in the original.

<sup>57</sup> Although see for example Kees van der Pijl on North Atlantic class relations, *Transnational Classes and International Relations*, London 1998, Leslie Sklair, *The Transnational Capitalist Class*, Oxford 2001; and Beverly Silver on the working class, *Forces of Labor*, Cambridge 2003.

with race and nation, largely suspended after the generation of Lenin and Otto Bauer, is a theoretical advance; but the emphasis is now very different.<sup>58</sup> Class, and class emancipation, are no longer central concerns compared to 'contemporary racism'. In a characteristically incisive conceptual analysis Balibar has demonstrated the curiously underdeveloped position of the proletariat in *Capital*, but he has not taken it up as a challenge; his contemporary social analysis has focused rather on the issues of nation, border, citizenship, Europe.<sup>59</sup> On the other hand, the postmodernist onslaught has largely put an end to feminist articulations of sex and gender with class; typically, a recent overview of 'third-wave feminism' makes no reference to class whatsoever.<sup>60</sup>

Europe provided the origins of class theory as well as of explicit class mobilization and politics; its working-class movements became models for the rest of the world. Europe still has significant parties claiming to represent labour, and trade unions remain a substantial social force there. Nevertheless, in terms of analysis and social theory, class is wintering better in North America. The work of Erik Olin Wright has played a central role in securing a legitimate location for Marxist class analysis within academic sociology. In a characteristically elegant approach, a recent contribution structures the issue by asking: if class is the answer, what is the question? Wright discerns six types of question which will frequently have 'class' as part of their answers:

- ▶ *Distributional location*: how are people objectively located in distributions of material inequality?
- ▶ *Subjectively salient groups*: what explains how people, individually and collectively, subjectively locate themselves and others within a structure of inequality?
- ▶ *Life chances*: what explains inequalities in life chances and material standards of living?

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<sup>58</sup> Balibar and Wallerstein, *Race, nation, classe*, Paris 1988.

<sup>59</sup> Balibar, *La crainte des masses*, pp. 221–250; *Politics and the Other Scene*, London 2002; *We, the People of Europe?*, Princeton, NJ 2004.

<sup>60</sup> Stacy Gillies, Gillian Howie and Rebecca Munford, *Third Wave Feminism*, Basingstoke 2004.

- ▶ *Antagonistic conflicts*: what social cleavages systematically shape overt conflicts?
- ▶ *Historical variation*: how should we characterize and explain the variations across history in the social organization of inequalities?
- ▶ *Emancipation*: what sorts of transformations are needed to eliminate oppression and exploitation within capitalist societies?<sup>61</sup>

Wright then defines his own work, and that of Marxism generally, as primarily concerned with answering the last question, while other approaches are governed by the rest. The question is, however, formulated in a remarkably oblique way. It is not, for instance: what social process is crucial to the elimination of capitalist oppression and exploitation? To which the classical Marxist answer has been: class struggle. Nor: what are the principal forces maintaining, or capable of changing and ending, capitalist oppression and exploitation? To which Marxists have answered, the bourgeoisie (or the capitalist class) and the working class, respectively.

What there is of recent works on class struggles in the world tends to come from North America. Salient examples would be Beverly Silver's theoretically innovative *Forces of Labor*, or the global working-class overview in *Socialist Register* 2002. A decisive question for the future of capital and labour in the world is how strong and capable the new masses of urban labour in China, India and other large Asian countries will become.

### *Exits from the state*

In the 1960s and 1970s, the state was a major object of contending Marxist theorization. Its current—more starkly capitalist—character may have removed it from the frontier of intellectual curiosity, and most of that interest has melted away, although Claus Offe's post-Marxist critical analyses make a significant exception.<sup>62</sup> But there have been many different exits from the state.

Firstly, we could distinguish the move from analysis of the national capitalist state, and its modes of class rule, to the global network. Under

<sup>61</sup> Erik Olin Wright, ed., *Approaches to Class Analysis*, Cambridge 2005.

<sup>62</sup> Claus Offe, *Modernity and the State*, Cambridge 1996.



the assumption that the nation-state, or at least its 'sovereignty', has declined in significance, political interest has turned to globalization and 'imperial' global networks. In so far as this involves a step away from 'methodological nationalism',<sup>63</sup> the shift is warranted. However, the bold claims of loss of state sovereignty have so far never been properly empirically argued. In any time-perspective longer than a few decades, it may even be seriously questioned. What was national sovereignty a hundred years ago, in Africa, in Asia, in Latin America? How sovereign were the then new Balkan states? Were not the state boundaries of travel and migration much more porous a century ago than today? Nor can the current world situation be properly understood before the position and capacity of the nation-state of the USA have been seriously investigated. Perhaps a global analysis of contemporary states would be more fruitful than focusing on a stateless globe? This is not the place to answer such questions—only to take notice of their not being properly answered, or even raised, by the mainstream shift in the centre of theoretical gravity.

Another move away from the state has involved a turn to civil society, as a basis for opposition to authoritarian rule and, in more utopian visions, as the best site for new social constructions.<sup>64</sup> The old concept—whose distinction from the state goes back to Hegel—was revived, by anti-Communist dissidence, in the final years of the decomposition of Eastern European Communism. It soon gained a worldwide reception, left and right, as a reference for many different movements and strivings for civic autonomy. In Eastern Europe, civil-society discourse also had the function of keeping out any serious discussion about political economy and the restoration of capitalism—until the latter was a *fait accompli*. The concept has continued a programmatically idealistic career, rather than furthering analyses of variable patterns of sociability, association and collective conflict.

A third exit from state theory was provided by moving to the more abstract level of political philosophy. The autonomy or specificity of the political, in relation to modes of production and to class structures, has been a central theme of several major thinkers. A seminal work here, once again, was Laclau and Mouffe's *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, with its sophisticated treatment of the classical political-philosophy problem of universalism and particularism, and their discursive substitution

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<sup>63</sup> Ulrich Beck, *Macht und Gegenmacht im globalen Zeitalter*, Frankfurt 2002, ch. 2.

<sup>64</sup> John Keane, *Democracy and Civil Society*, London 1988.

of the hegemonic struggles of particular interests for the struggle of classes. From completely different sources of philosophical inspiration, Habermas's grand theory of communicative action presented a normative programme of a universalistic dialogical politics.<sup>65</sup>

Former disciples of Louis Althusser have made distinctive new contributions to radical political philosophy.<sup>66</sup> Balibar, the most circumspect and perhaps the most influential among them, has brought skilled textual readings to bear both on pre-Marxian political philosophy (Spinoza, Rousseau, Locke, Fichte), but also on the political theorization of violent antagonisms. Alongside the traditional left-wing politics of emancipation and transformation, Balibar reflected on a politics of 'civility', regulating 'the conflict of identifications'.<sup>67</sup> Violence here appears more physically tangible and more ambiguous, even dubious, in meaning, rather than in the cathartic form discussed by Sartre and Fanon.

While his anti-capitalist political project is very explicit, and his philosophical erudition conspicuous, Slavoj Žižek's political philosophy appears more like a stance than a reasoned deduction. A compulsively productive writer and formidable polemicist, with a seemingly inexhaustible supply of cinematic and other contemporary cultural aperçus, Žižek has become an emblematic figure of contemporary radical iconoclasm. His Tito-era Slovenian background, as a former Communist turned anti-Communist dissident, provides him at the same time with a classical left-wing political formation and with impeccably respectable liberal credentials. This combination has made Žižek the only Leninist with an admiring Western following in recent years.<sup>68</sup> Like that of most other radical philosophers today, Žižek's anti-capitalist project is very vague; this provoked an ill-tempered exchange between him and Laclau, each accusing the other of a political project meaning 'nothing at all'.<sup>69</sup> More

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<sup>65</sup> Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, 2 volumes, Boston, MA 1984–87. In an interesting abstention from argument, Laclau and Mouffe dismiss Habermas's ideal of a non-exclusive public sphere of rational argument as a 'conceptual impossibility'. A tyranny of concepts? See Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 2nd edition, London 2000, p. xvii.

<sup>66</sup> Jacques Rancière, *Aux bords du politique*, Paris 1990; Balibar, *Masses, Classes, Ideas*, New York and London 1994; Badiou, 'Politics and Philosophy: An Interview with Alain Badiou', appendix to *Ethics*, London 2001.

<sup>67</sup> Balibar, *La crainte des masses*, ch. 1.

<sup>68</sup> Žižek, ed., *Revolution at the Gates*, London 2002.

<sup>69</sup> Laclau, 'Structure, History and the Political', in *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality*, p. 206; Žižek, 'Holding the Place', in the same publication, p. 321.

noteworthy is an acknowledged ambivalence in Žižek's political position. His fascination with Lenin is accompanied by a seemingly equivalent admiration of the 'authentic conservative' who, like the British Empire Tories admired by Kipling, is not afraid of the 'necessary dirty work'.<sup>70</sup> It should be added that, while (post-) Marxists have played truant from the state, sterling contributions to analysing the making of the European nation-states have been made from different perspectives by Michael Mann and Charles Tilly.<sup>71</sup>

### *Return of sexuality*

The distinction between (biological) sex and (social) gender was first elaborated by Ann Oakley in 1972, and the question of the construction and transformation of gender constituted a key theoretical focus for socialist and mainstream feminism in the 1970s and 80s.<sup>72</sup> But the givenness of sex has more recently come under attack, sometimes in ways similar to the questioning of any non-discursive givenness of class. The intellectual reassertion of sexuality has come from the American philosopher Judith Butler—'sex itself is a gendered category'<sup>73</sup>—and in theorizations from the French battleground of philosophy and psychoanalysis.<sup>74</sup> Oakley herself has conceded the non-tenability of the sex–gender distinction.<sup>75</sup> Politically, the givenness of sex has been powerfully challenged by assertive homosexuality. The latter has achieved a certain specific theoretical presence in Anglo-Saxon academia under the banner of 'Queer Theory'.

The surge of literary-philosophical postmodernism in feminist discourse broke most of the links between feminist theory and the left that had earlier come under the heading of socialist feminism.<sup>76</sup> Scandinavian

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<sup>70</sup> Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, London 1999, p. 236; *Conversations with Žižek*, pp. 50–1.

<sup>71</sup> Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power*, vol. II, Cambridge 1993; Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital and European States, AD 990–1990*, Oxford 1990.

<sup>72</sup> Ann Oakley, *Sex, Gender and Society*, London 1972.

<sup>73</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, New York 1990, p. 7.

<sup>74</sup> Kelly Oliver, *French Feminism Reader*, Oxford and New York 2000; Dani Cavallaro, *French Feminist Theory: an introduction*, London and New York 2003.

<sup>75</sup> Ann Oakley, 'A Brief History of Gender', in Ann Oakley and Juliet Mitchell, eds, *Who's Afraid of Feminism?*, London 1997, pp. 29–55.

<sup>76</sup> See Oakley and Mitchell, eds, *Who's Afraid of Feminism?*. For a global materialist account of sex, gender and reproductive relations over the past century, see Göran Therborn, *Between Sex and Power. Family in the World, 1900–2000*, London 2004.

welfare-state-oriented feminists experienced the encounter with post-modernist feminism as a shock.<sup>77</sup> The cosmopolitan literary theorist Toril Moi has felt compelled to explain 'What is a woman' to academic feminist milieux apparently disoriented as to the answer.<sup>78</sup> Yet it is also striking that feminism is today far more salient than the left in the Euro-American world.

The return of sexuality is also manifest in current Marxist and post-Marxist philosophy, in its eager preoccupation with psychoanalysis. Žižek was trained as a Lacanian; Laclau's recent work on populism is much interested in Lacan's *objet petit a*, and other topics of the master. Belatedly, Balibar has followed his teacher, Althusser, into studies of Freud and Lacan, for instance in his 'Three Concepts of Politics'; albeit in a cautious and selective manner.<sup>79</sup>

### *Homage to networks*

Classical 19th-century sociological theory focused on modes of social connectivity, distinguishing 'association' and 'community'. Mid 20th-century sociology concentrated on the 'group', whether 'primary' or 'secondary', and organizations. More recently, the *network* has replaced the concept of structure or organization in social theory. Network analysis of social connectivity has a background in social psychology, above all in the 'sociometric' studies of friendships in school milieux, and in postwar community studies by anthropologists and family sociologists. The concept was also used in US studies of the diffusion of ideas. From the 1960s on it was used to develop mathematical models for access, diffusion and power structures in an expanding number of areas, from vacancy chains to sexual contacts and global city patterns. The key theoretical figures have been Harrison White and his students.<sup>80</sup> The notion of the network reached a wider public in the 1980s through business-management studies that attempted to grasp and generalize the success of Toyota and other Japanese corporations. Further interest was stimulated, of course, by the electronic revolution and the internet. Michael Mann made 'networks of interaction' a central, but loosely used, concept

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<sup>77</sup> Hildur Ve and Karin Waerness, oral communication.

<sup>78</sup> Toril Moi, *Sex, Gender and Body*, Oxford 2005.

<sup>79</sup> Balibar, *Masses, Classes, Ideas*, ch. 7; *Politics and the Other Scene*.

<sup>80</sup> Harrison White, *Identity and Control*, Princeton 1992, James Rule, *Theory and Progress in Social Science*, Cambridge 1997, ch. 5.

in his monumental work on power, with a view to avoiding any systemic or bounded notion of 'society'.<sup>81</sup>

Networks are looser and more open than both groups and organizations; they focus on individual actors and their resources, rather than on constituted collectivities; they form channels for markets as well as bureaucracies, movements and classes. As such, networks are highly important social connections, tying together complex, loosely coupled social systems. Their rise to centre-stage in contemporary social theory and analysis should be seen as not only deriving from intellectual discovery, but as an indicator of changing social relations. It was the post-Marxist sociologist, Manuel Castells, who articulated the 'network society' in a magisterial work of social analysis, setting out from new management conceptions and information technology, without trying to relate it to previous sociological theory.<sup>82</sup> Since then it has become a key analytical concept in the influential neo-Marxist enterprise of Hardt and Negri's *Empire* (2000) and *Multitude* (2004); both the global sovereign and its opposition are presented as network powers. On the other hand, while crucial to recent post- and neo-Marxist social theorizing, 'network' itself has no political affiliation. Nor has it been subjected to any analytical critique, scrutinizing its relative acumen and the boundaries of its indubitable fruitfulness. It is a concept still enjoying its honeymoon undisturbed.

### *Political economies*

European 'Western Marxism' had always regarded political economy from something of a distance, and it is not surprising that this should have widened over the past decades. Exceptions to the rule endure, among them the ecologically oriented world-economic analyses of Elmar Altvater.<sup>83</sup> Until his premature death a few years ago, Egon Matzner carried on the classical Central European Marxist tradition of economic analysis. Anglo-Saxon radicalism, by contrast, has always contained a strong current of critical political economy, Marxist and non-Marxist. While the spirited and forceful engagement with liberal economics by British left-wing neo-Ricardians of the 1960s—the Cambridge,

<sup>81</sup> Mann, *Sources of Social Power*, 2 vols so far, Cambridge 1986–.

<sup>82</sup> Manuel Castells, *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*, 3 volumes, Maiden, MA and Oxford 1996–98.

<sup>83</sup> For example, Elmar Altvater, *Der Preis des Wohlstands oder Umweltplünderung und neue Welt(un)ordnung*, Munster 1992.

England versus Cambridge, Mass. debate on capital theory—does not seem to have sustained any enduring encroachments on the domination and self-confidence of liberalism, radical political economy in the Anglo-Saxon world is still very productive. Its major achievements in recent years have tended to derive from creative disciplinary cross-fertilizations, of economics and history, economics and political science, economics and philosophy.

Iconoclastically heterodox, world-systems analysis has been a vital force for critical social analysis. Developed from the mid-1970s by Wallerstein and others, and currently being extended in new directions by Arrighi, it has also proved stimulating to colleagues outside, and often in disagreement with, the school. Though pioneered by sociologists, the analysis is predominantly economic and historical, while its attention to global power relations adds a crucial political dimension. To date it has proved a more fruitful approach than recent plunges into theories of globalization. With a unique sense of the limits of the self in history, Wallerstein has already warned his followers and collaborators of the project's coming demise; the basis for his prediction was, precisely, its degree of success, and implicit recognition as global analysis.<sup>84</sup> One may add that, once the planetary world has been recognized as a central focus for social analysis, indeed as the most important, the rise of a number of different approaches to global studies is to be expected.

The imminent end-of-capitalism theses of Arrighi and Wallerstein have been noted above. Two other major, much more down-to-earth, combinations of economics and history avoid epochal power-shift theses or speculations. Robert Brenner, who first made his name with an account of the origins of capitalism so striking and iconoclastic as to engender 'the Brenner debate', has now produced an economic history of post-war advanced capitalism, *The Economics of Global Turbulence* (2006).<sup>85</sup> The driving analytical force here—powering through a wealth of empirical detail and its temporal vicissitudes—is the tendency to over-capacity and the declining profit rate. From Oxford, Andrew Glyn has provided a succinct and highly readable overview of recent capitalist development

<sup>84</sup> Immanuel Wallerstein, 'The Rise and Future Demise of World-Systems Analysis', *Review*, vol. XXI, no. 1, 1998.

<sup>85</sup> See T. H. Aston and C. H. E. Philpin, eds, *The Brenner Debate*, Cambridge 1985; Robert Brenner, *The Economics of Global Turbulence*, London 2006.

and its effects on human welfare.<sup>86</sup> Brenner envisages continuing turbulence; Glyn sees declining prospects for rich-country workers and ends by questioning the meaning of further growth, opting for that curious utopia of resignation, the 'Basic Income'.

A recent, highly ambitious project at Santa Fe aims to produce a radical political economy by bringing together economics and political science. So far, its main output is *Globalization and Egalitarian Redistribution*, edited by Pranab Bardhan (economist at Berkeley), Samuel Bowles (economist and director of the Behavioral Sciences Program at the Santa Fe Institute), and Michael Wallerstein (Yale political science). For all its equations and diagrams, the work's 'lessons' on the possibilities for redistributive policies under global constraints—fairly substantial, the editors conclude—may not be that novel. But it is also noteworthy for two other reasons: first, the power of its political-cum-economic modelling, of which one participant, Adam Przeworski, has been a master, previously within an explicitly Marxist approach; and second, the generous mainstream economic backing—from the Russell Sage foundation—for a project on 'Persistent Inequality in a Competitive World'.

The main straddler of economics and philosophy is probably Amartya Sen, but there have been many interfaces between analytical philosophy and analytical economics. The turn of John Roemer from *maoisant* mathematical economics to 'radical economic ethics'—from *A General Theory of Exploitation and Class* (1982) to *Theories of Distributive Justice* (1996)—is an interesting trajectory and remains, from a left viewpoint, an honourable one. Economics and sociology were brought together in *Les structures sociales de l'économie*, one of the last major works of Pierre Bourdieu. A penetrating investigation of the French housing market, it deploys some of his key concepts, like the 'habitus' of dispositions and the 'field' of force and conflict, both in the empirical research and in a generalizing theoretical critique.<sup>87</sup> In *Banking on Death and Age Shock: How Finance is Failing Us*, Robin Blackburn has produced an ambitious left-of-centre recasting of pensions strategy for an ageing society, which builds on Rudolf Meidner's proposal for a share levy from corporations to finance social development.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Andrew Glyn, *Capitalism Unleashed*, Oxford 2006.

<sup>87</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Les structures sociales de l'économie*, Paris 2000.

<sup>88</sup> Robin Blackburn, *Banking on Death*, London 2002; *Age Shock: How Finance is Failing Us*, London 2006.

Political economy also includes what is usually labelled 'institutional economics', non-Marxist but usually left-of-centre. Many of its modern classics are now submerged under neoliberal lava: Ragnar Frisch, Gunnar Myrdal, Jan Tinbergen. But below the Pantheon there is still a vibrant sub-culture of critical institutional economics; in its main centres, Britain and France, this is still largely situated within economics, but also benefits from elements of sociological inquiry. In France, the main school has been 'regulation theory'; central representatives have included Michel Aglietta, Robert Boyer and Antoine Rebérioux.<sup>89</sup> In Britain, the post-Marxist Geoffrey Hodgson has returned to consider the relations between economics and history, as well as evolutionary theory.<sup>90</sup>

### III. THE REPERTOIRE OF POSITIONS

Social theorizing is still related to—indeed, committed to—specific political positions, and a sociological history of the field must give some account of these, while steering clear of the twin temptations of apologetics and denunciation. The following account distinguishes two poles, in relation to which the politics of recent left-wing thought might be located. One is theoretical: Marx and Marxism, as an intellectual tradition. The other is political: socialism, whose goal is a social order distinctively different from capitalism. (Socialism is used in looser meanings too, but they do not pertain here.) The two axes form a system of coordinates, which may be deployed as a heuristic searching device; the results should not, however, be seen as a permanent address book.

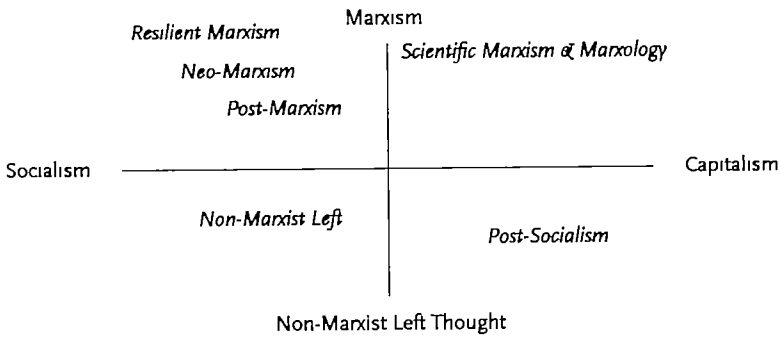
The diagram should, of course, be seen as a very approximate map, aiming to convey relative positions correctly but making no claims about the scale of distances. What it shows first of all, perhaps, is that theory and politics are two different dimensions, even among politically committed social theorists. Secondly, it indicates a new distance from socialism, in the sense of a distinctive, actually attainable type of society. A conception of a socialist alternative has become a minority view among the

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<sup>89</sup> Michel Aglietta and Antoine Rebérioux, *Corporate Governance Adrift*, Cheltenham 2005; Robert Boyer and Yves Saillard, eds, *Théorie de la régulation*, Paris 1995; J. Rogers Hollingsworth and Robert Boyer, eds, *Contemporary Capitalism. The Embeddedness of Institutions*, Cambridge 1997.

<sup>90</sup> Geoffrey Hodgson, *After Marx and Sraffa*, Basingstoke 1991; Geoffrey Hodgson, Makoto Itoh and Nobuharu Yokokawa, *Capitalism in Evolution*, Cheltenham 2001.



FIGURE 1: *Current Left Theoretico-Political Positions*

intellectual left, although this does not, in most cases, imply a step into the capitalist fold.

In a continental comparison, left-of-centre intellectual currents in North America, Marxist and non-Marxist, tend to be more to the left of the meridian above than their European equivalents. On the whole, the resilience of the small North American left stands out, in comparison with the larger but much softer and more often disheartened forces of Europe. It is the US that has produced such intransigent left-wing best-seller writers as Noam Chomsky and, more recently, Mike Davis.<sup>91</sup> The annual *Socialist Register* was launched in the mid-1960s as a very British enterprise, but is now, in the new millennium, edited from Toronto. The classical left-wing journals of the US, like *Monthly Review* and *Science and Society*, may now be shadows of their former selves, but they have survived. The huge American academic culture is still capable of sustaining a range of left publications. Recent meetings of the American Sociological Association have been much more explicitly radical than the European meetings. (True, European left-wing academics have more opportunities for extramural practice.) The great 'right turn' occurred earlier in the US, with elements of the 1940s and 50s *trotskisant* left becoming Cold Warriors by the early 70s, spawning a generation of rabid neoconservatives. The remainder of the American left never had much hope in the immediate future; it would also be further removed

<sup>91</sup> Noam Chomsky, *Deterring Democracy*, New York 1991, et al; Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums*, London 2006.

from the blows of the Soviet implosion, the defeats of Eurocommunism and the surrenders of Eurosocialism.

### *Post-socialism*

If a certain distance from any explicit socialism has characterized most of the Euro-American left recently, the elaboration of a post-socialist left-of-centre agenda has become a specific project. The wasteland of triumphant Thatcherism was a natural breeding-ground for 'post-socialism'. One effort was John Keane's celebration of 'civil society', as scornful of social democracy and its 'unworkable model of state-administered socialism' as it was of 'totalitarian communism'.<sup>92</sup> In the last years of the Cold War this position was riding high; a decade of capitalist immiseration of large parts of Eastern Europe following 1989 elicited no qualification, or even comment, from the author.<sup>93</sup>

A few years later the sociological theorist Anthony Giddens proclaimed his move 'Beyond Left and Right' in a book full of Thatcherite sneers at social democracy and the welfare state.<sup>94</sup> Brusquely dismissing the notion that there could be any 'third way' in the classic leftist sense—between 'welfare socialism' and 'Communism'—Giddens in fact turned out to have prepared the ground for a short-lived, but nevertheless contemporarily unique, politico-theoretical post-socialist alliance that was soon in its turn dubbed the 'Third Way'. For some years, Giddens became the officious theoretician of the British Prime Minister and his New Labour regime, giving an intellectual gloss to a party that had lost—or rather severed—any connection to 'first way' social democracy, in the wake of a series of traumatizing defeats dealt by a ruthless (though always civilly minoritarian) neoliberalism. For a time this project did comprise a genuine relation between social theory and politics, although of a different kind to that presupposed by the Marxist-socialist 'triangle' discussed above. It should be noted that, in Europe at least—there may still be some East Asian interest—the attractions of the Third Way ended with the *Realpolitik* of invading tanks; although, in contrast to Czechoslovakia

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<sup>92</sup> Keane, *Democracy and Civil Society*, p. 26.

<sup>93</sup> John Keane, 'Introduction to the New Edition', *Democracy and Civil Society*, London 1998.

<sup>94</sup> Anthony Giddens, *Beyond Left and Right*, Cambridge 1994, pp. 73ff.

in 1968, in this instance the tanks were headed out of the country, into Iraq, with the Blair government a leading force in the aggression.<sup>95</sup>

Ideological controversy apart, Giddens's defence of the Third Way six years later provided an exemplary summary, accurate yet concise, of the most important criticisms that had been levelled against it, to which he responded with a wide range of social-scientific reference.<sup>96</sup> A sometime collaborator of Giddens, Ulrich Beck is a radical cosmopolitan democrat, for whom the communism and socialism of Europe's 'first modernity' are now 'used-up' ideas.<sup>97</sup>

### *Non-Marxist left*

Social democracy, by far the major component of the non-Marxist left, has produced few theoreticians of wide-range ambition in recent years. The work of the Swedish sociologist Walter Korpi has largely centred on empirical analysis of social-policy institutions, but his explanatory theorizations of power resources and the 'democratic class struggle', together with his scientifically robust defence of the welfare state, are important contributions to social theory.<sup>98</sup> Politically too, Korpi has remained a staunch social democrat.

French sociology has generally remained 'left of centre', even while the media and the principal intellectual platforms in Paris have veered sharply to the right.<sup>99</sup> During the 1990s, the most outstanding contribution was that of Pierre Bourdieu. Out of the spotlight in the heyday of rue

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<sup>95</sup> Post-socialism has also had a generational dimension. In 1994, Ralph Miliband died; a prominent Marxist political scientist, author of *The State in Capitalist Society* (1969), Miliband's unrepentant *Socialism for a Sceptical Age* (1994) was published posthumously. In the same year his son, David, who was to become a senior Downing Street staffer and a member of Blair's Cabinet, edited a collective volume, *Reinventing the Left*, in which Giddens tabled a post-socialist agenda.

<sup>96</sup> Giddens, *The Third Way*, Cambridge 1998; *The Third Way and Its Critics*, Cambridge 2000.

<sup>97</sup> Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society*; and *Macht und Gegenmacht im globalen Zeitalter*, p. 407.

<sup>98</sup> Walter Korpi, *The Democratic Class Struggle*, London 1983; Korpi and Joakim Palme, 'The Paradox of Redistribution and Strategies of Equality', *American Sociological Review*, vol. 63, no. 5, 1998.

<sup>99</sup> Alain Touraine, *Beyond Neoliberalism*, Oxford 2001.

d'Ulm Marxism, Bourdieu built up a formidable reputation as a top-class social researcher, before emerging late in life as the foremost intellectual spokesman of the anti-capitalist left, in Europe as well as France. His was a powerful voice against the capitalist 'misery of the world'; if he did not hold out the prospect of a socialist horizon, nor did he ever condone the existing order.<sup>100</sup>

There has been little radical programmatic thinking in social democracy anywhere, since the ambitious but politically ill-fated wage-earner funds proposal by the Swedish blue-collar unions, for a while reluctantly adopted by the SAP. Most distressing has been the absence of any significant social-democratic visions in Eastern Europe. It is instead a Brazilian-American legal philosopher, Roberto Mangabeira Unger, who has had the imagination to answer the question *What Should the Left Propose?*. His appeal to a petty-bourgeois longing 'for a condition of modest prosperity and independence' and to a 'universal desire' for 'national sovereignty' may sound timid. But his proposals for institutional change are potentially far-reaching. These are guided by five 'institutional ideas': high domestic savings and taxation as a basis for national independence; social policy based upon empowerment and capacity; democratizing the market economy and bringing about 'an upward tilt in the return to labour'; a universal responsibility for caring work, and a 'high-energy democratic politics'.<sup>101</sup>

The World Social Fora, one of the most important and inspiring developments in left-wing politics in the new millennium, have so far spawned little social theory; the Portuguese legal scholar Boaventura de Sousa Santos has, however, made a sterling contribution in trying to analyse and interpret this complex and heterogeneous movement.<sup>102</sup> At the same time, themes of inequality or working conditions under capitalism, long central to the left, have also been theorized in radical ways outside it. The contrasting approaches of Richard Sennett, highly literary and descriptive, and of Charles Tilly, always rigorously systematic, provide two

<sup>100</sup> Pierre Bourdieu et al., *La misère du monde*, Paris 1993 [*The Weight of the World*, Stanford 1999]; *Contre-feux*, Paris 1998 [*Firing Back: Against the Tyranny of the Market*, London 2003].

<sup>101</sup> Roberto Mangabeira Unger, *What Should the Left Propose?*, London 2005, pp. 166, 24–31.

<sup>102</sup> See the Verso series, *Reinventing Social Emancipation: Towards New Manifestos*, London 2006 and forthcoming.

powerful examples.<sup>103</sup> Radical social theory remains a big house, with many doorways.

### *Marxology and Scientific Marxism*

The northeastern quadrant of Figure 1 is not necessarily empty. It is logically possible, today more than ever, to abstain from any anti-capitalist practice or ideological stance, while finding Marx to be an insightful and intellectually stimulating analyst of capitalism. *Pace* Burawoy and Wright, such a position is not necessarily degenerate, cynical or pessimistic.<sup>104</sup> Given the normal cultural-political embeddedness of social science, however, we should expect this field to be very sparsely populated. The most salient contemporary example of this position is the Indian-British economist Meghnad Desai, appointed by Blair to the House of Lords. With the help of its library he has written a spirited account of the dynamics of capitalism, in which Marx joins hands with Hayek. *Marx's Revenge* (2002) is a rehabilitation of Marx the social scientist of capitalist political economy, originally inspired by a re-reading of Lenin and the classical Marxist economists, while taking an agnostic position as to whether any post-capitalist social order is possible.

The outgoing 20th century saw two remarkable, synthetic readings of Marx: *Spectres of Marx* by Jacques Derrida (1993) and *The Postmodern Marx* by Terrell Carver (1998). Derrida and Carver both saw *Marxes*, in the plural; and both underlined, in a sympathetic and yet critical way, the political significance of Marx, but as a historical figure, out of joint with the Marxism of any contemporary movements. Derrida now placed his own whole oeuvre of deconstruction 'within a certain tradition of Marxism, within a certain spirit of Marxism', while illuminating his reading with literary pyrotechnics.<sup>105</sup> Carver's postmodernism was a 'mild' one, which did not confront modernity and the Enlightenment,

<sup>103</sup> Richard Sennett, *Respect in a World of Inequality*, New York 2003; *The Culture of the New Capitalism*, New Haven, CT 2006; Charles Tilly, *Durable Inequality*, Berkeley 1998; Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, Charles Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention*, Cambridge 2001.

<sup>104</sup> Michael Burawoy and Erik Olin Wright, 'Sociological Marxism', in Jonathan Turner, ed., *Handbook of Sociological Theory*, New York 2002, p. 484.

<sup>105</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Spectres de Marx*, p. 151. See also the discussion of Derrida's book in Michael Sprinker, ed., *Ghostly Demarcations*, London 1999.

and manifested itself mainly in a perceptive analysis of Marx's language and writing strategies in various texts.<sup>106</sup>

### *Post-Marxism*

Post-Marxism is used here in an open sense, referring to writers with an explicitly Marxist background, whose recent work has gone beyond Marxist problematics, and who do not publicly claim a continuing Marxist commitment. It is not tantamount to ex-Marxism, nor does it include denunciation or renegacy; development and new desires, yes, maybe even divorce, but only on amicable terms. The boundaries between post- and neo-Marxism have become blurred in recent times and some important writers—Etienne Balibar, for example—may well be listed under both rubrics. Here, no critical evaluation is invested in the grouping; however, the term 'neo-Marxist' will be used only for theoretical projects which both signal a significant departure from classical Marxism and retain an explicit commitment to it.

Laclau and Mouffe, accepting a post-Marxist label, refer to 'the reappropriation of an intellectual tradition, as well as the process of going beyond it'.<sup>107</sup> *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, discussed above, may be regarded as one of the most important contributions from this position. Deploying a series of formidable abstractions, the authors toil through classical Marxist political theory, from German and Russian social democracy to Gramsci; but the crux of their project remains the French Revolution—in itself a venerable tradition, from Marx and Lenin to Gramsci—and the call for 'radical democracy', in which a 'socialist dimension' is to be achieved by 'deepening the democratic revolution'.

German Critical Theory was arguably the first major current of post-Marxism, politically implicit in the frozen silence of Adorno and Horkheimer after World War II, loftily explicit in the work of Jürgen Habermas. As a post-Marxist, Habermas has remained an intellectual and theoretician of a liberal (in the American sense) left, becoming a left-of-centre conscience of the West German nation; far less radical than Sartre, but more widely hearkened to. In recent years, he has grappled with the moral issues surrounding genetic engineering, and struggled to come to terms with the increasingly violent and disagreeable

<sup>106</sup> Terrell Carver, *The Postmodern Marx*, Manchester 1998, p. 2.

<sup>107</sup> Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, p. ix.

implications of a *Westbindung* to the USA—one to which Habermas, as a German anti-nationalist, has always been committed. In the context of the invasion of Iraq there occurred an interesting, more Europeanist rapprochement between Habermas and Derrida.<sup>108</sup> For this overview, however, it is Habermas's programme of dialogical politics—laid out in his magnum opus on Communicative Action—and his defence of modernity as an 'unfinished project' that have to be underlined.<sup>109</sup> Claus Offe, once Habermas's *Assistant* and a long-time post-Marxist, is one of the few who, as a prominent political scientist, has continued the 1960s–70s Marxist preoccupation with the state, among other things taking it into the post-Communist states of Eastern Europe.<sup>110</sup>

The current professorial successor of the Frankfurt School is Axel Honneth. His most important work has concerned the struggle for recognition, initiated as a topic for modern social philosophy by Hegel's analysis of the dialectic of the master–slave relation. Honneth has further differentiated this into three: the spheres of love, law and solidarity.<sup>111</sup> In a debate with the American philosopher Nancy Fraser, who was spurred by strident US 'identity politics' into defending redistribution, Honneth argued for a broader normative theory of experiences of injustice than the 'more or less utilitarian anthropology' of Marxism.<sup>112</sup> From an egalitarian perspective, as I have argued elsewhere, 'recognition' may be seen as a crucial aspect of existential equality, one of three fundamental dimensions of (in)equality; given Honneth's background, the modernist optimism of his observations on 'moral progress' may also be worth noting.<sup>113</sup>

Post-Marxism has not been limited to textual reinterpretation; it may equally well take the form of new empirical forays or of social commentary. Two of the most extraordinary works to emerge from a Marxist background are the landmark sociological analysis of world society by

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<sup>108</sup> *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida*, interviewed by Giovanna Borradori, Chicago and London 2003.

<sup>109</sup> Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action; Philosophische Diskurs der Moderne*.

<sup>110</sup> Offe, *Modernity and the State*.

<sup>111</sup> Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflict*, Cambridge, MA 1995.

<sup>112</sup> Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition?*, London 2003, p. 127.

<sup>113</sup> Göran Therborn, 'Understanding and Explaining Inequality', in Therborn, ed., *Inequalities of the World*, London 2006, pp. 186ff.

Manuel Castells, noted above, and the strikingly ambitious historical 'mediology' of Régis Debray. The latter begins from a critique of the Marxist concept of ideology, and an engagement with the Althusserian discussion of 'ideological state apparatuses', opening out onto a *longue durée* exploration of the materiality of mediated communication, or the 'mechanics of [cultural] transmission', with a particular focus on the Judaic and Christian religions.<sup>114</sup> Theoretically original and skilfully crafted, these works are first of all contributions to social analysis rather than to social theory; as such they are outstanding achievements. Finally, the prolific output of social commentary by Zygmunt Bauman has had a strong transnational resonance; at heart, this is a sociological variety of postmodernism. Bauman's recent writings travel light, burdened neither by research nor by theoretical analytics, but borne up by an unusual life wisdom, a trained observer's eye, and a fluent pen.<sup>115</sup>

### *Neo-Marxism*

For all its political defeats, the intellectual creativity of Marxism has not come to an end. The last decade has seen the emergence of at least two highly original, hard-hitting discourses, which explicitly derive from and build upon Marxist legacies. We have already noted the irreverent philosophical politics of Slavoj Žižek, who has not only radically renewed Marxist cultural criticism but vigorously defends an iconoclastic Marxism against 'conformist liberal scoundrels'. Žižek's oeuvre includes a spirited defence of classical modernity and the extensive use of popular cinema in cultural-philosophical commentaries. He has flown in the face of conventional wisdom to the extent of introducing, with commentary, a new selection of Lenin's writings from 1917.<sup>116</sup> Žižek's exhortation to 'repeat Lenin' posits an openness to the possibilities for radical social change in an apparently hopeless situation, following disastrous defeat—in Lenin's case, World War I and the break-up of the Second International.

The second major manifestation of neo-Marxism, Hardt and Negri's *Empire* and *Multitude*, claims to have found the revolutionary exit of the

<sup>114</sup> Régis Debray, *Media Manifestos*, London 1996; *Transmitting Culture*, New York 2000.

<sup>115</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity*, London 1992, *Liquid Modernity*.

<sup>116</sup> See respectively: *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism?*, London 2002, p. 4, *Ticklish Subject; Revolution at the Gates*.



21st century: 'This is a revolution that no power will control—because bio-power and communism, co-operation and revolution remain together, in love, simplicity, and also innocence. This is the irrepressible lightness and joy of being communist.' Or again:

The possibility of democracy on a global scale is emerging today for the first time . . . After this long season of violence and contradictions . . . the extraordinary accumulation of grievances and reform proposals must at some point be transformed by a strong event, a radical insurrectionary demand . . . In time, an event will thrust us like an arrow into that [already] living future.<sup>17</sup>

Hardt and Negri also refer to the Lenin of *State and Revolution* as an inspiration for the 'destruction of sovereignty', though here combined with the Madisonian conception of checks and balances. The two bodies of work have several features in common, in addition to their upbeat radicalism and international publishing success. Both are essentially works of political philosophy—Žižek's main books are probably *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989) and *The Ticklish Subject* (1999)—rather than of social theory. Negri and Žižek are professional philosophers, while Negri's former Paris student Hardt is a literary theorist with a philosophical orientation. Both sets of authors write with verve and gusto in a baroque style of *assemblages*, displaying an impressive erudition and a capacity for association which encompasses a great number of fields and traditions, at high speed and with little time for historical contextualization or empirical investigation. Different variants of dissident Communism—and a more similar mainstream-Communist family of origin—form the political backgrounds of Negri and Žižek: respectively, the spontaneist and violent Italian far left, and a meandering Slovenian Communism-cum-dissidence. They are also in line with Western Marxist practice in the sense of reading and using Marx through the lenses of other great European intellectual traditions: primarily the psychoanalysis of Lacan, but also a philosophical spectrum with Heidegger at its centre, in the case of Žižek; the philosophy of Spinoza, in that of Negri. Their dazzling style as thinkers has attracted readers far from their own political or philosophical stance.

Žižek's most recent book presents itself as his 'most substantial work in many years'. It revolves around a well-found metaphor, *The Parallax*

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<sup>17</sup> Respectively: Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, p. 413, italics omitted; *Multitude*, Cambridge, MA 2004, pp. xi and 358.

*View*. A parallax is 'the apparent displacement of an object (the shift of its position against a background), caused by a change in observational position that provides a new line of sight'. But this ambitious work, in the usual style of far-ranging associations, anecdotes, cinematography and polemical shock, also shows the diminishing returns of this sort of free-wheeling critique. While Žižek still draws some interesting aperçus out of his hat, many of his thematic discussions lack both cutting edge and analytical depth. For example, his patient rebuttal of the Lacanian Jean-Claude Milner's Zionist ranting; his respectful scepticism towards Alain Badiou's 'exalted defence' of revolutionary terror; or his Napoleonic analogy in support of his thesis of 'the historical necessity of the Stalinist outcome' of the October Revolution.<sup>118</sup>

While Žižek may say, 'I have nothing whatsoever to do with sociology',<sup>119</sup> the work of Hardt and Negri does directly pertain to social analysis—their Franco-Italian philosophical mode of writing notwithstanding. Their approach centres around two key concepts, empire and multitude, both taken from Spinoza. Hardt and Negri interpret Spinoza's *imperium* simply as sovereignty, and in their work the concept has nothing of the material concreteness of, say, the Roman or the British empires. Rather, it is a global network to which sovereign power has migrated from the nation-states and in this sense is 'a step forward', as these authors of a self-proclaimed postmodernity assert in a typically modernist way. The concomitant to Empire is the 'multitude', which here replaces the Marxist 'proletariat' and the 'people' of classical democratic theory. The 'worker masses' of Negri's ultra-left Italy of the 1960s–70s are now writ (globally) large as 'mass intellectuality'. The multitude is similarly comprised of all the planet's workers and 'poors', now increasingly interrelated across a 'smoothed' world space of withering civil society and declining national boundaries, by common knowledge and common relationships. Its expanding practice will bring about global democracy, 'a future that is already living'. Socialism remains absent from the prophetic vision.<sup>120</sup>

In their emphasis on information and networks, especially as the new locus for sovereignty, there is a diagnostic similarity between Hardt and Negri's work and the empirically grounded, end-of-millennium analysis by Castells. The most important divergence between them concerns social

<sup>118</sup> Žižek, *The Parallax View*, Cambridge, MA 2006, pp. 253ff, 326ff, 292–3.

<sup>119</sup> Žižek and Daly, *Conversations with Žižek*, p. 32.

<sup>120</sup> Respectively: Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, pp. 43, 336, *Multitude*, pp. 348–50, 358.

differentiation. In contrast to one global multitude 'in an expanding, virtuous spiral' of commonality,<sup>121</sup> Castells defines the 'truly fundamental social cleavages of the Information Age':

First, the internal fragmentation of labour between informational producers and replaceable generic labour. Secondly, the social exclusion of a significant segment of society made up of the discarded individuals whose value as workers/consumers is used up, and whose relevance as people is ignored.<sup>122</sup>

A major empirical work on the workers of the world, Silver's *Forces of Labor*, alluded to above, concludes on a note similar to Castells: 'there is no reason to expect that just because capital finds it profitable to treat all workers as interchangeable equivalents, workers would themselves find it in their interests to accept this. Rather, insecure human beings (including workers) have good reasons to insist on the salience of non-class borders and boundaries (e.g., race, citizenship, gender).'<sup>123</sup> While the bestsellers of Hardt and Negri, like those of Žižek, testify to the continuing creativity and attractiveness of Marxist traditions, sociologically minded readers at least are likely to be sceptical of the former's invocation of Spinozan claims that 'prophetic desire is irresistible' and that 'the prophet can produce its [sic] own people'.<sup>124</sup>

### *A resilient left*

The recent trajectory of Marxism also includes a mode of resilience, cutting its path through thickets of adversity across an altered, un-mapped terrain. The Great Encyclopaedia of resilient Marxism is the *Historisch-Kritisches Wörterbuch des Marxismus*, directed by the philosopher Wolfgang Fritz Haug and published by *Das Argument* in Hamburg, in cooperation with the Free University of Berlin and the Hamburg University of Economics and Politics.<sup>125</sup> In its high-level intellectual doggedness,

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<sup>121</sup> Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, p. 350.

<sup>122</sup> Castells, *Information Age*, vol. 3, p. 346, italics omitted.

<sup>123</sup> Beverly Silver, *Forces of Labor*, p. 177.

<sup>124</sup> Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, p. 65.

<sup>125</sup> *Das Argument*, a quarterly journal edited by the philosophical-feminist couple Wolfgang and Frigga Haug, remains an important platform for European Marxism, as does *Prokla*, an abbreviation for 'Problems of Class Struggle', directed by the veteran economist Elmar Altvater. There is not room to consider the whole field of left-wing journals, but mention should be made of *Socialist Register*, noted above, and *Capital and Class*. For a fuller account of this field (in which NLR has its place) see the preliminary version of this essay referenced in

the Dictionary is a unique exemplar of never-surrender. Conceived in the 1980s, launched in 1994, it is planned to extend to some fifteen volumes. Although largely a German project, its eight hundred collaborators include Etienne Balibar, Pablo González Casanova and other international figures; its website, [www.hkwm.de](http://www.hkwm.de), is bilingual. Volume 6, which appeared in 2004, took us up to 'Justice'. At its planned two-year pace, the project will be completed in 2022. 'Marxism' here is not only understood in its broadest ecumenical sense, but also read across a wide socio-cultural register; there are entries on Brecht, double-work, and *Dummheit in der Musik* (stupidity in music).

The 1990s also saw an ambitious attempt at an exegetic 'reconstruction' of Marx's critique of political economy, Moishe Postone's *Time, Labor and Social Domination* (1993), and a valiant and pedagogical defence of dialectical thinking by another American, Bertell Ollman's *Dialectical Investigations* (1993).<sup>126</sup> Postone's reading takes the concepts of value and commodity one level of abstraction further away from socio-economic analysis, into a conception of social domination—reminiscent of Max Weber's 'iron cage' of rationalization—which 'subjects people to impersonal, increasingly rationalized structural imperatives and constraints that cannot adequately be grasped in terms of class domination . . . It has no determinate locus.'<sup>127</sup> As commercial evidence for a resilient interest in Marxism, one might also cite the multi-volume 'Retrospective' on Marx and his work put out by Routledge in the 1990s, of which the eight volumes on Marx's social and political thought, edited by Bob Jessop, are the most pertinent here.<sup>128</sup> Individual examples of resilience

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footnote 1. On the other hand, if *Les Temps Modernes* survived the death of Sartre and de Beauvoir, it is hardly a major left publication any more. More directly politically oriented journals have been more vulnerable: in Britain, the once lively *Marxism Today* folded with the ending of the Soviet Union. In Italy, *La rivista del manifesto* gave up in 2004. New journals have also been started, with powerful backing: *Historical Materialism* is put out by Brill, a university publisher in Leiden; the American-edited *Rethinking Marxism* is published by Routledge.

<sup>126</sup> Ollman has continued his dialectical teaching into the new millennium, now provided with a choreography of dialectical investigation, *Dance of the Dialectic*, Urbana, IL 2003, p. 169.

<sup>127</sup> Postone summarizing his own book, 'Critique and Historical Transformation', *Historical Materialism*, vol. 12, no. 3, 2004, p. 59.

<sup>128</sup> Bob Jessop and Charlie Malcolm-Brown, eds, *Karl Marx's Social and Political Thought*, 4 volumes, London and New York, 1990, Second Series, Bob Jessop and Russell Wheatley, eds, London and New York, 1999.

are plentiful and, once again, extend across a far wider disciplinary field than that of social theory. But two deserve to be added to this inevitably partial and limited selection. Among the few political survivors of the French *événements* of 1968, Daniel Bensaïd is a leading Trotskyist cadre and the author of a well-written *Marx for Our Times*. On the other side of the Channel, Alex Callinicos is probably the most prolific of contemporary Marxist writers, with a wide-ranging philosophical, social and political bibliography.<sup>129</sup>

In a recent, somewhat unsystematic collection of autobiographies by sociologists of the 1960s cohort, two in particular, by Michael Burawoy and Erik Olin Wright, keep the banner of Marxism flying.<sup>130</sup> Burawoy, an incisive, theoretically driven ethnographer of work, and Wright, the no less theoretically driven researcher of class structures, have also signalled a joint project to build 'sociological Marxism'.<sup>131</sup> How far this will develop in practice remains to be seen, but as a plan it is the most ambitious scholarly project of resilient Marxism, with a great potential. While innovative in intention—'building'—its reassertion of the Marxist political agenda, as well as its core analytics—minus the theory of value—makes 'resilient' a more apt epithet here than 'neo'. Burawoy and Wright's sociological Marxism has an explicitly normative, as well as scientific, commitment, linked to 'the political project of challenging capitalism as a social order'. Its sociological core is the concept of class as exploitation, with a research agenda that follows from a theory of 'the contradictory reproduction of contradictory class relations'—essentially, a Marxian analysis of capitalism and its political and ideological institutions, though shorn of the original's historico-philosophical wrapping. Intrinsic here is the assumption that the capitalist dialectic is still operating, though in a somewhat smoothed-over fashion:

First, the dynamics of capitalist development generate changes in technology, the labour process, class structure, markets, and other aspects of capitalist relations, and these changes continually pose new problems of social reproduction . . . Second, class actors adapt their strategies in order

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<sup>129</sup> As a small sample, see, for example, Alex Callinicos, *Against Postmodernism; An Anti-Capitalist Manifesto*, Cambridge 2003; *The Resources of Critique*, Cambridge 2006.

<sup>130</sup> Alan Sica and Stephen Turner, eds, *The Disobedient Generation*, Chicago 2005.

<sup>131</sup> Burawoy and Wright, 'Sociological Marxism', pp. 459–86.

to take advantage of the weaknesses in existing institutional arrangements. Over time, these adaptive strategies tend to erode the ability of institutions of social reproduction to effectively regulate and contain class struggles.<sup>132</sup>

Reproduction is especially problematic and conflictual for class relations: 'Social relations within which antagonistic interests are generated will have an inherent tendency to generate conflicts, in which those who are harmed will try to change the relation in question.'<sup>133</sup> Instead of going on to demonstrate the power of this programme, the authors veer off into one of their pet utopias, 'universal basic income'; but that should not detract from the immense value of their concise, concrete and jargon-free restatement of Marxism as a contemporary science. While aware of the implications attendant upon a 19th-century 'ism', Burawoy and Wright retain it as a marker of belonging to and continuing a tradition.<sup>134</sup>

#### IV. LOOKING AHEAD

What emerges, first of all, from this overview is the uneven effect of the broken triangle of classical Marxism—politics, social science and philosophy. In the North Atlantic region (and the rest of the world is not so different, with a few local exceptions in Indo-Latin America), Marxist politics has either disappeared or become completely marginalized; at best, as a sympathetic observer of Kerala, Tripura or West Bengal might put it, it has been suspended. The socialist horizon, bright red just three decades ago, has vanished.<sup>135</sup>

On the other hand, left-wing intellectual creativity has not ceased. Its greatest moments may have passed: not only that of Marx and Engels, but also of the Second International, from Kautsky to Lenin; of Western Marxism from Lukács to Gramsci; and of Eastern and Southern Marxism from Mao to Mariátegui; even the more recent moments of Althusser,

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<sup>132</sup> Burawoy and Wright, 'Sociological Marxism', p. 473.

<sup>133</sup> 'Sociological Marxism', p. 474. <sup>134</sup> 'Sociological Marxism', p. 460n.

<sup>135</sup> In so far as they have survived, most of the European Communist Parties and their successors have shown little interest in intellectual Marxism. Most of the Eastern European ex-cps have situated themselves well to the right of Scandinavian Social Democracy. The innovative and self-critical East German PDS and its Rosa Luxemburg Foundation do retain some commitment to Marxism, and so do the two remaining 'orthodox' parties, the Greek and the Portuguese.

Bourdieu and their different national equivalents. But there is much more of an intellectual left production today than, say, fifty or forty years ago. The left-wing generation of the 1960s, particularly of those radicalized before the romantic moment of 1968, has not surrendered. The value of the thematic changes in discourse, noted above, is debatable; but they do not appear as promising objects of denunciation. The existing repertoire of positions is unlikely to please everyone, but it does nevertheless include rallying-points for nearly everybody on the left.

However, formative generational experiences tend to have enduring effects, and this writer's critical distance is, of course, suspect. His views are those of someone from the 1960s generation, writing about his contemporaries, about his comrades or former comrades. What about the prospects ahead?

Capitalism still produces, and will continue to produce, a sense of outrage. To that extent, a line of continuity between the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries will remain, in resistance as well as in critique. Coming philosophers are almost certain to publish new readings of Marx. Twenty-first century anti-capitalist resisters and critics are unlikely to forget the socialist and communist horizons of the past two hundred years. But whether they will see the dawn of a different future in the same colours is uncertain, perhaps even improbable. New cohorts of anti-capitalist social scientists will certainly emerge, many will read Marx, but it may be doubted whether many will find it meaningful to call themselves Marxists. The classical Marxist triangle has been broken, and is most unlikely to be restored.

The resilience of the 1960s left is spanning an important historical caesura. This was the generation that lived both the peak of working-class strength in developed capitalism, and the beginning of its decline. It saw both the image of revolution, in 1968, and the close of the revolutionary perspective opened up in 1789 and 1917, in the implosion of 1989–91; in the interim, it experienced the real sex and gender revolution of the late 20th century. It was the generation that lived through, and criticized, the peak of North Atlantic capitalism, and who went on to witness the return of East and South Asia to the front stage of the world.

For contingent, practical reasons—of space-time availability and of linguistic limitations—this overview has been confined to the North

Atlantic/North American area. That is still the base from where the most deadly bombers and missiles take off, but it is no longer the chief front on which the destiny of capitalism in the 21st century will be decided. Hence the extraordinary importance of global theorizing and, even more, of global empirical investigations. In the current situation, a certain *defiant humility* seems to be the most adequate intellectual stance. Defiance before the forces of capital and empire, however powerful. Humility before the coming new world and the learning and unlearning that it will call for.





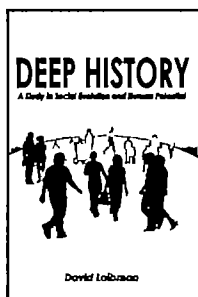
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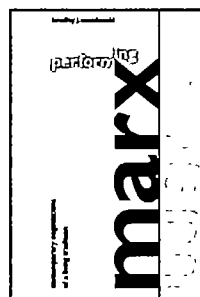
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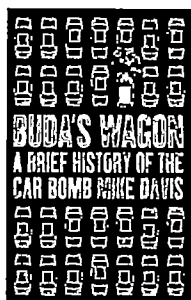
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TOM NAIRN

### UNION ON THE ROCKS?

'The next necessary thing', wrote Clifford Geertz in *The Anthropologist as Author*, 'is to enlarge the possibility of intelligible discourse between people quite different from one another in interest, outlook, wealth and power, and yet contained in a world where, tumbled as they are into endless connection, it is increasingly difficult to get out of each other's way.' New nationalisms are part of that connection, and part of the resultant structures of evasion, or 'identity'. Mongrels need new rules. And *all* nations are becoming mongrels, hybrids or foundlings, in the circumstances of globalization.

This is the overall impression left by Michael Fry's definitive new book, *The Union: England, Scotland and the Treaty of 1707*—both a careful history of the Treaty of Union, detailing in particular the years from 1698, and a polemical argument for its repeal, and for the resumption of Scottish independence. Note, 'resumption' rather than 'claiming'. Its appearance could hardly be more timely. May 1st, 2007 will mark the 300th anniversary of the 'United Kingdom of England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland'. This elderly piece of multiculturalism has endured alternative titles, 'Britain' and 'Great Britain' for example, all intended to make it sound more united than it ever was. People appear to be getting used to the idea of Iraq disappearing, divided between Kurdistan and one or more Muslim-Arab states. But an analogous fate may overtake Britain's faltering Union, if Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland opt for new directions at the May 2007 elections to their 'devolved' assemblies. In that case a new acronym may soon

come into play, the 'RUK' ('Rest of the UK'). This would be mainly England of course, though now with the curious sense of 'Little England' plus London—a cosmopolis with nothing little about it, outside of Westminster and Buckingham Palace.

About twenty years ago Eric Hobsbawm, annoyed by my own connections with what then seemed the hopeless cause of Scottish nationalism, reminded me sharply that it was the Scots who really made the British Union in the 18th and 19th centuries. He was implying that to withdraw from the UK would be a retrograde move, and that to try and reform it made more sense. Whatever is now thought of that political recipe, Hobsbawm's historical judgement was surely right. Though the British Kingdom unites a surprising number of countries and cultures, ranging from Wales to the micro-nations of the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands, its backbone remains the link with Scotland. That rapport, in turn, rests formally upon one thing. This is not an idea, or a sacred code or emblem, or even what sociologists call a 'habitus'. It is a sheaf of papers.

I recall vividly the first time I set eyes on the Treaty, at a court hearing in the 1980s on Scottish protests over Mrs Thatcher's Poll Tax. Some Scottish lawyers maintained that a head-count tax might be incompatible with the 1707 Treaty of Union, and hence illegal under Scots Law. The presiding judge testily decided that a copy of the Treaty was required, and dispatched a clerk to make a photocopy from the Signet Library archives. Some hours passed before he returned with a handful of folded sheets—the nearest thing to a written constitution that British statehood has ever attained. A few days later the verdict came. There were no grounds for thinking the Poll Tax incompatible with any clauses of the Treaty, and Scots would have to put up with it. The Treaty hadn't saved them. The same miserable old sheets would be included, unchanged, in Blair's 1998 legislation on devolution. So the restored Scottish parliament was to go on being hamstrung by them, exactly like its ancestor of 292 years before.

This and many other absurdities can be made more sense of in the broader perspectives of *The Union*. Fry's close scrutiny of the motives for the 1707 Treaty underlines its unique character. It involved neither colonization nor forced assimilation—of the sort displayed earlier in Wales and Ireland—but an international agreement between two frequently battling kingdoms. They had been united under the same monarchy since 1603, but even this had grown precarious. Scottish in origin, the Stuart dynasty constantly threatened an armed come-back after twice being evicted, during the civil wars of mid-century and again in 1688. (The question would not be finally resolved until forty years after the parliamentary Union, at the Battle of Culloden in 1746.) In 1707, Queen Anne's English parliament was demanding more serious political reform, a single assembly located

(naturally) in London and supporting the new Protestant monarchy, forerunner of today's Windsors. Their hope was for a more united Anglo-Scots ruling class, which would be easily dominated by the English aristocracy. At that time, poor and thinly-populated Scotland represented only a small part of the main island's population, and even less of its resources.

London's new urgency was fueled by international problems. An expanding colonial empire could no longer tolerate home-island dissent, least of all from a regime that was showing alarming signs of wanting its own colonies and foreign policy. Scotland had often been allied with France, the dominant great power of the time and England's chief competitor. The Stuarts were in exile in France, and counting on diplomatic and military support from Louis XIV. At the same time, the condition of the Scottish economy had become pitiable. No-one will ever be sure what percentage of the population starved to death during the terrible 1690s, a period to which Fry pays great and deserved attention. In these circumstances, the Edinburgh political elite sought an over-ambitious remedy: launching a colonial enterprise of its own, by occupying the Isthmus of Darien (today's Panama).

A joint counter-attack by England and Spain defeated this venture in 1698–99 but, as Fry recounts, simultaneously emphasized the need for London to close the northern 'back door'. After the assimilation of Wales and Ireland, a different solution had to be found for the Scots. In contemporary terms, 'security' called for a political deal, rather than the dangers of occupation and repression. The English knew they could defeat Scotland's formidable clannic armies. They had done so already in Cromwell's time, but at huge cost; in today's world, comparable perhaps to recent assaults on Afghanistan. A much better solution was to buy off the northern aristocracy and warlords (including some compensation for their humiliation over Darien).

*The Union* is an updated retelling of the whole story, enlivened by the historian's own passionate and political involvement with the country that emerged. (Fry has described in a December 2006 *Prospect* essay his transition from pro-devolution Conservative parliamentary candidate—he joined the Tory party in 1966—to Scottish nationalist.) Such emotions aren't concealed by his conclusion, where the recent phase of devolution is dismissed as 'a flawed outcome' that has ignored 'deeper problems of the nation, of redefining its character and purpose'. He goes on to suggest that 'there may indeed be no satisfactory halfway house between the state of the nation as it was before 1603 and . . . as it was after 1707', so that today 'we are travelling back from the destination reached at the Union, if along a less bumpy route.' The question, then, is 'whether we should not make greater haste to the place where we started, as an independent nation'.

The Union deal was brokered before democracy and nationalism assumed anything like their modern forms. In the early-modern era, popular approval was not required—fortunately for the upper classes favouring the changes. Fry enjoys recounting the episodes of lower-class indignation and near-insurrection that accompanied the parliamentary debates of 1706–07, and makes extensive use of the reports compiled by an English journalist and spy, Daniel Defoe, better known today for later writings like *Robinson Crusoe*. Arriving in Edinburgh, Defoe was surprised

to find a nation flying in the face of their masters, and upbraiding the gentlemen, who managed it, with selling and betraying their country, and surrendering their constitution, sovereignty and independency to the English.

Edinburgh was at that time poorly paved, with streets and alleyways that provided ample ammunition for the traditional form of protest: ‘pebbling them wi’ stanes’. Had the contents of the Treaty been better known, Defoe observed, few parliamentarians ‘would have dared go home without a guard to protect them’.

Yet the pre-democratic, feudal-estates assembly of 1706–07 was by no means a contemptible body, as Fry several times underlines. Some did sell their votes, but many refused. Among the pro-Union ranks, some genuinely believed in their cause, and argued that short-term sacrifices would be justified by longer-term gains, more enduring peace and stability. In addition, he argues: ‘The vigour of the Scots’ existing traditions and institutions let them shape the Union too, for good or ill: it was a genuine choice in 1707, not just a factitious product of English expansionism.’ All over Europe, small countries and city-states were coming under similar pressures to amalgamate and form larger units—a good example is Catalonia, whose assimilation to all-Spanish rule was in part forced (ironically) by a Scottish army under the Duke of Berwick. By contrast, the Scots were able to retain or even reinforce important native institutions, including the legal and educational systems. Surrender of the state did not entail that of their ‘civil society’ (to use a later term coined in Scotland). And it is of course the latter that has survived into the present, and reacted to Iraq and other failures of New Labour.

Survival of the nation was one thing; tolerable survival and popular acceptance quite another. Fry also enjoys retelling the astonishing tales of bribery that punctuated the Scottish parliamentary debates and vote, finally made on January 16th, 2007 (though not formally celebrated until May 1st). On that day the Duke of Hamilton, himself one of the most dubious figures in the aristocracy, commented: ‘And so the darkest day in Scotland’s history has finally arrived. The point of no return has been reached, and nothing is left to us of Scotland’s sovereignty, nor her honour or dignity or name’.

Buying the elite was one thing, but convincing the rising middle classes and stane-pebbles took far longer—well over half a century on most accounts, punctuated by both political and military revolts until 1746.

What made the real difference was not the Union Treaty, but the empire. Scots of all classes discovered that overseas expansion in the later part of the century, first to North America and then to many other countries, furnished opportunities greater than their own abortive colonization of 1698 could ever have done. To a great and sustained movement of population was added a striking cultural expansion, the Scottish Enlightenment. As Fry concedes, this first successful phase of Union (from David Hume's time up to 1832) 'saw glorious intellectual achievement, the one thing that gives Scottish history any universal significance, and it ill behoves us now to complain about it.' The intelligentsia that had renounced its own statehood compensated by imagining a universal realm of progress, liberated from borders and inherited constraints. One of the most telling parts of Fry's Chapter 7, 'Fair Words—After the Union' is an account of Adam Smith's father, the 'Comptroller of Kirkcaldy', in Fife, for whom 'the Union proved a bit of a disaster'. But of course his son, Adam Smith Junior, would react to the miseries of the Customs Inspectorate with a theory about a tariff-free world: *The Wealth of Nations* (1776).

Contrary to some conventional views, it was almost certainly the Scots who headed the European emigration tables for the 19th and 20th centuries—a phenomenon Fry touches on, having produced a comprehensive account in his 2002 *The Scottish Empire*. Emigrants came from the rural lowlands and the towns and cities, not from the most traditional areas of clannic culture and less developed agriculture, as happened in Norway, and in Ireland after the 19th-century potato famine. The massive outflow came from all regions and classes, and continued for two centuries. The overall effect of such wide and enduring emigration was to constitute something like a 'haemorrhage society' at home—a nationality reconfigured by emigration, rather than just affected by it. The advantages for innumerable individuals had to be set against a mounting and decisive loss for the community, mourned by later writers like Edwin Muir, who complained in 1935 of seeing a country 'gradually being emptied of its population, its spirit, its wealth, industry, art, intellect and innate character'. The mythologies of nationalism are well known; but they should more often be set against those of migration and internationalism, still headier concoctions that rarely pause to measure this darker side of the process they extol.

It is, after all, that other side that partly explains the lateness of Scottish political nationalism, at which Fry's new history is directed. For all too long, the enterprising spirit of post-Union society was enthralled by the outward-bound impulse, which had plenty of time to itself become a tradition, and

seem part of Scotland's 'innate character'. It was not just the absence of military occupation or police repression that distinguished post-1707 Scotland. Important as this was—when compared to Ireland, for example—there was also the positive sense of large-scale contribution and achievement made possible by imperialism. *The Union* describes the national shames accompanying the Treaty; but these were to be eclipsed by the greater, more structured opportunities that favoured one generation after another, until quite recently. The predominantly successful saga of emigration in turn encouraged a deeply conservative mind-set. Investment by all classes in the process made it practically 'unthinkable' to alter course against the 1707 Union bargain.

True, the empire finally shrank and converted itself into a relatively meaningless Commonwealth, nowadays a venue for sport rather than politics. However, the phasing out of imperial attitudes and 'Greatness' was a lengthy business which, after pulling out of India in 1948, took the form of many relatively minor disgraces and humiliations. These generated cumulative depression rather than wishes for a break—that English mixture of melancholia and ironic resignation, perhaps best conveyed in the postwar poetry of Philip Larkin. The defeats were not big or meaningful enough to force revolt: everyone put up with decline, Scots included. 'Decline' was nothing like the fate inflicted on France in 1940, or on the losers of World War II, or upon the Soviet domains of the 1980s. To an indurate general conservatism, such retreat could always be presented as something other than terminal. And it was compensated for by second-rung material prosperity, as well as by vaguer hopes of redemption. Union cohabitation obviously grew less appealing as a social option, and following World War I a growth of nationalism in Scotland and Wales reflected that. But surely nothing too disastrous or final could overtake it?

And indeed it did not—until now. For the order at which Fry's book is aimed is one currently undergoing collapse. Each day brings the crash of another wall or roof beam. On 12 January 2007, the *Daily Mail* (rumoured to be Prime Minister Blair's preferred breakfast reading) appeared with the banner headline: 'Union In Jeopardy: Majority of Scots See Independence as Inevitable'. More astonishing still was the second heading, pointing out that most English opinion apparently agrees with them: 'more than half', according to the opinion survey used. And the United Kingdom's life-expectancy? Five years or so, with luck and some prevarication. The doleful prognosis is if anything supported by the paper's editorial page, a compilation of half-dead clichés about 'losing clout', as well as the Security Council Seat, the throwing away of proud inheritances and 'constitutional vandalism'. One can almost hear them toiling away down in the Middle England boiler room, striving to raise some steam.



But there is no longer anything there. Defeat in the Middle East is the trigger, but it should be remembered that it is happening at a moment when all other recourses have proved disappointing, or failed. Thatcherism has been followed by Blairism; that is, over twenty-five years neither the Right nor the Left of Britain's political spectrum has managed to restore anything like the previous age of global distinction and domination, or redeem the old sense of meaning and self-confidence that 'Britishness' used to depend upon. Bizarrely, Gordon Brown—currently preparing for prime-ministerial takeover—launched an unprecedented campaign to boost not just New Labour but *British identity as such* at a Fabian conference in January 2006. Should he become Prime Minister, the 'Save Britain' movement threatens to raise US-style flagpoles in Ukanian front gardens for the restored Union flag; 'Britain Day' could soon succeed the former 'Empire Day'. But if Brown believes that old-style Britishness can be conjured up from the dead, he is mistaken.

From 1979 to the present, foreign policy has grown ever more crucial for London—the era of the South Atlantic War, a protracted (and unresolved) debate over European Union, and NATO's Balkans crisis, as well as of the advance of globalization. Status and a global presence have shown themselves to be more important to the all-British identity than the postwar welfare state, or the conventions of liberal legalism. In the end, it is foreign-policy fixations and delusions that have dragged the state into the present abyss. A feared subordination to Europe has turned into actual subservience to George W. Bush's American neo-conservatism, and condemned the UK army (with its large Scottish contingent) to the Iraqi charnel-house, and the hopelessness of Afghanistan.

But over exactly the same period, globalization has been changing everything in quite different ways. A profound shift of outlook has encouraged aspirations for change and new starts—'tumbled as they are into endless connection', in Geertz's phrase, great powers and poor devils alike. For all its pitfalls, the one world thrown up remains an authentically wider and expanding one; and bound, therefore, to resonate particularly strongly in a culture like Scotland's. In some ways Scottish society may have become over-committed to outflow and identity-switches—pathologically outward-looking, as it were. However, this same inclination may have attuned it to the new totalizing perspective, and to both the secular and religious belief-systems that have accompanied it. Globality is a disconcerting successor to foundering imperialism. But however much the former must distance itself from the latter, the line of descent should not be occluded.

The UK posture under both Thatcher and Blair has been as a vocal leader of an unreformed global imperium, one that bases itself on the Cold War's conclusion. The descent upon Iraq should have been a victory

for that would-be new, US-led world order. It has turned into an infamous and gory failure of the old, in which Great Britain's role has lapsed into a despicable mixture of bleating apologist and camp guard. Could any contrast be greater, or less controllable in its repercussions? In the old-Brit two-party system, both Tories and Labour supported the American neo-imperial adventure; but neither imagined that failure might impose intolerable strains, not simply on those in office, but on the grander system whose axis remains the 1707 Treaty of Union.

Fry's history crowns an ongoing debate about British identity and inheritance that includes Linda Colley's *Britons, Forging the Nation*, Thomas Smout's *History of the Scottish People*, Neal Ascherson's *Stone Voices* and Christopher Harvie's *Mending Scotland*. In Scotland at least, it looks as if popular instinct and response are now overtaking such 'history wars'. I cited above the question Fry concludes with, of 'making greater haste' to return to independence; and answers are already being given, by one opinion poll after another. In November 2006 the *Scotsman* published a survey,

showing a clear majority of Scots favour independence, and illustrating a significant swing from Labour to the SNP. The *Scotsman* ICM poll found 51 per cent now favoured full independence with only 39 per cent against—the biggest level of support for separatism for eight years. The poll also forecasts major gains for the SNP at next year's Holyrood elections with the party on course to win enough seats to form Britain's first nationalist-led government.

In the run-up to the May 2007 elections for the devolved parliaments in Scotland and Wales—two days after the 300th commemoration of the Union, for the Scots—and with the worst of the Iraqi tail-end still to come, a majority is looking forward to independence. As in all similar surveys, only a section of the emergent majority can be regular voters for the Scottish National Party, though their support is now steadily rising from its normal 25 per cent. In other words, a broader movement including Liberal-Democrats, Greens, Socialists and many Labour rank-and-file supporters is already in existence, and likely to be allies of the Nationalists next year. Fry's book is in effect an argument for a reformed Scottish Conservatism to join them, and secure an independent platform for separate democratic advance.

Stranger still, this Tercentenary election will itself be a byproduct of New Labour's half-hearted constitutional reforms after its 1997 return to office. Then, the rising autonomist pressures within Labour's ranks in Scotland and Wales made it necessary to experiment cautiously with 'home rule'. It was taken for granted that a semi-proportional electoral system would be the best form for the devolved assemblies. Britannic mythology remained unshakably convinced that proportionality and fair shares are recipes for

democratic anarchy and incompetence—the opposite of ‘sovereignty’, the stable and supposedly omnipotent authority cherished by the 1688 system. Thus a carefully delineated ‘fair go’ might help keep the discontented marginals harmlessly busy, and lessen the prospect of nationalism winning real power.

In fact what it provided was some breathing-space for new ideas to fight their way into Welsh and Scottish public opinion, and eventually into regional office. These powers are cramped, naturally, and counterbalanced by a gross reinforcement of central and increasingly authoritarian rule. But there’s no mystery about this: such reinforcement had been one aim of the devolution strategy itself, from the start—‘a regime of provincial subordination’, as Fry calls it. In that sense, ‘devolution’ can also be interpreted as another version of older historical models like the Soviet imperium of 1946–89: folk-dance as inoculation against serious political independence (and capacity for dissent).

On the constitutional reform front, the radical horizons of 1998 have taken on the dimensions of a disintegrating dog-kennel. In 2005, the ancient Westminster magic returned New Labour to office with a large majority based upon less than 22 per cent of the electoral vote. New Labour then returned the favour by making clear it had no serious plans whatever to farther alter the system that has ‘served us so well’. In 1997, for instance, the preposterous House of Lords was to have been transformed into an at least semi-democratic, electable second chamber. But a decade on, this affront to democracy still awaits its nemesis—the only substantial difference being that by now nobody expects anything better, or indeed takes much interest in the farce. Blair’s collapse has involved his interrogation by the police about an ongoing peerages-for-cash scandal. ‘Modernization’ of this kind has generated a UK climate recognizable enough in many other parts of the neoliberal world: generalized scorn and despair of politics and politicians, and mounting anguish about what the country now *means*, in a shrinking world-web that somehow renders identity more, rather than less, important.

This is of course the background against which more and more Scots (of all shapes and grades) perceive ‘no alternative’ to resuming independence. Not ‘claiming’ it like an ex-colony, but (as Fry describes the situation) merely returning to a long-postponed normality, via renunciation of the Treaty of Union. At the opening session of the devolved Scottish Parliament in 1998, its first Chairperson, Winifred Ewing, simply declared that an assembly abrogated *sine die* in 1707 was back, and about to resume business. In spite of everything, against all the odds, the day had come. And found the nation still there. Her statement of presence was widely ridiculed at the time for its

remote romanticism, and flight from practical reality. Nine years later, we can see that Ewing was merely slightly ahead of the times.

A bell was actually being rung, and not just for the media, or the attendant elite. Whatever the spores that coursed out from that day (other historians will trace them), they seem in the end to have reached and disturbed every obscure, puzzled, tongueless corner of this odd, relatively well-off *and* relatively deprived society: 'developed', and yet seriously lacking in communal will and self-confidence. That will-less void was of course the Union's achievement. And as Fry argues, the process of recovering and peopling it is now unlikely to cease. In other words, Scottish independence is about more than a 'democratic deficit' in general terms. A more specific history and discontent has brought acknowledgment that some democratic *nationalism* is the only way to carry it forward.

But *The Union* also omits, or skates over, several important themes. For all its merits, it remains the work of a thoroughly disgruntled conservative. More precisely, it expresses an unusual anarcho-conservatism: that is, a radicalism of the Right rather than the Left, but with quite similar shortcomings. Fry's forte is caustic impatience with compromises, half-measures, correctness and institutional stuffed shirts. Funny and liberating as this is, it leads him to underestimate the important part that equivocation and piecemeal changes have played in the formation of today's Scottish nationalism.

After the rise of the SNP in the 1970s, an initial referendum was staged on 'Home Rule' in 1979, under James Callaghan's Labour government. It failed, and was succeeded by eighteen years of Thatcherite Conservatism. But throughout these years, movements quietly continued to keep the issue alive, and a left-of-centre Constitutional Convention was set up that planned a better kind of self-government, supposedly distinct from both the Unionist regime and straightforward separation. This won increasing support and respect, and naturally provided much of the content for Blair's Scotland Act in 1997–98. Scots themselves did most of the work for their devolution; and insufficient as it has proved to be, this process nonetheless created real foundations for today's parliament. It is not the case that it has *just* been a 'flawed outcome . . . all dressed up in tartan with nowhere to go', as Fry puts it, 'wasting its time and money on trivialities, on efforts at micro-management of personal lives'.

The author maintains that there can be 'no satisfactory halfway house' between region and true nationhood. Possibly; but an unsatisfactory halfway house may also have prepared the way for something better. Its emergent political class are no more all 'mediocrities' than were the parliamentarians of 1706–07 whom Fry describes. And its very existence has injected some confidence into a nation confined for three centuries to the most limited 'low politics' of town and county councils. Here, Fry's radicalism of the right

seems almost as astigmatic as that of the left-wing enthusiasts he has so often (and with reason) criticized. He has confidence that a more distinctive Scottish conservatism will emerge, and be another plus for independence. But its formation too is bound to depend on gradual development, involving both alliances and contrasts with other movements of a new Scottish left and centre.

There is another absence from *The Union's* police-station line-up 'ethnicity'. The term has become inescapable, and at a time of recently revived nationalism and conflict is especially important. In spite of its novelty (the 1960s), 'ethnic' is today routinely applied to both separatist and minority situations: being 'ethnic Albanian' or an 'ethnic Kurd' has become indispensable for deciphering respective problems, while multiculturalism has come to haunt every metropolitan language. For Scots it is even more significant: as I said earlier, they have become a nation of emigrants inhabiting a world configured by such stereotypes. And one response has been the general adoption of what Tom Devine, author of *The Scottish Nation* (1999), calls 'Highlandism': an exceptionally visible mixture of tartan plaid, bagpipe music, folk-dance and the cult of Robert Burns. Like many others, Fry may despise this ethnic mythomania, but in a work so focused on the meaning of 1707 for the present (and immediate future), more should have been said about it.

It is crucially important to stress the drastic variance of both history and contemporary politics in Scotland from nearly all of what that mythology implies. There is no single or even majority 'ethnos' among the Scots: the nation is irretrievably composite in origin, and to a striking extent unified more by institutions and past statehood than by either language, customs or culture. In the conclusion to his *Scottish Nationality* (2001), Murray Pittock stresses that deciphering complexity is the difficult central task of anyone working in the field, frequently against pressures from the London-based media. In November 2006, the *Economist* carried a cartoon depicting Gordon Brown, of all people, dancing about in a kilt with a discarded claymore at his feet. As Pittock observes,

Cartoons in *The Times* and the *Guardian* . . . continue to show the exponents of Scottish nationality in the claymore-wielding, poverty-stricken garb of the Jacobites thus caricatured 250 years ago. Both elements feed each other. the self-congratulation of elements in a local elite are identified as provincial *braggadocio* by the metropolitan eye, which as a result sees no reason to alter its own perspective.

Everyone in Scotland knows in advance that each move towards a resumption of independence will be treated to this kind of abuse: parochialism, call of the blood, instinct taking over from reason, 'ethnicity' for its own sake—and so on, and on. Only the previous week Lisa Vickers, the United States

Consul in Scotland, contributed to the knee-jerking when she announced that Americans will always stick by England-Britain. The same hostility is quite normally voiced as fear of a North Sea Bosnia, or as misguided opposition to the healthy style of globalization represented by President Bush and Blair's New Labour. That is what the 'Greatness' business is about—whether in Washington DC, or among its bedraggled camp-followers in Whitehall and elsewhere. And 'ethnicity' is by contrast inherently narrow, a betrayal of greatness-defined progress: a mortal menace to the present, therefore, or a hopeless retreat into the past—or preferably both. Globalization is meant for Greats, not tomfool left-overs and ethnic nostalgics. It's G8 stuff, nothing to do with West Papuans, Kurds, Chechens, Scots, Burmese Karens, Tibetans, Welsh, Québécois, left-out Muslims, Basques, Montenegrins, and all the rest.

It is quite true that a widespread and often unpleasant attitude surfaces among Scots: 'anti-Englishness'. This bears little relation to textbook ethnicity or blood-line inheritance. It is, in truth, anti-Britishness: something like latter-day anti-Americanism, a resentment of overweening state power and assumed superiority. Though Fry provides many examples of the mentality at work in 1706–07, and is good at situating the strange story of the Union in the broader framework of European history, he says little directly about England in this sense. The absence is all the more noticeable because of the book's urgently contemporary bearing. He reveals his own conversion to Scottish independence, but says next to nothing about the English nationalism this is bound to confront. However, *The Union* exposes how a placid assumption of England's ingrained universality ('ancient' even then) dominated the negotiations three centuries ago. Even before it assumed formal existence, 'Britain' was taken to mean Anglo-Britain, an imperially open society which all others should naturally accept, and indeed welcome. Such leadership was not to rest upon brute force, but 'hegemony'.

What harm can there be, after all, in a Great Power shepherding the way towards civilization, along roads that all must, in the end, imitate and follow? The United Kingdom's hegemonic role (or 'burden') may have been merged into that of the United States, as Consul Vickers now reminds impatient Scots. But England's essence will remain true to the outgoing mission—as if the Protestantism of earlier Britons had now mutated into the neoliberalism of post-1989 victory. New times, however, call for a quite different style of outreach, beginning with emancipation from the paleo-imperialism of the Bush–Blair North Atlantic. Just as free trade was impossible without assorted forms of protection and barriers, so globalization will only work via renewed forms of nationalism and identity conservation. I think the Scots know as much, if not more, about the outward-bound mentality. And they may be more aware of its pitfalls and

temptations. Why else is the contemporary scene dominated by an ever-growing list of battling nationalist and irredentist claims, and 'rediscovered' identity concerns? Neoliberal correctness put these all down as fossils. But since consciousness-raising too is part of globalization, the relics can't help growing more aware of their plight. And a self-conscious 'relic' is a nationalist dilemma. So far the burning-glass of Iraq has generated or concentrated three of them. Mobilized nationalities would not submit to high-command imperatives in the 20th century; they are surely even less likely to do so in the 21st. Seen in this way, Scotland's situation is typical rather than exceptional; and England's turn will surely come—'turning inward' is only a part of doing this, necessary for any remedy.

Even so, outside observers are bound to ask: isn't *some* intermediate or compromise arrangement possible, among nationalities so long conjoined, and sharing so much—even with all the shortcomings of the Union? For example, a federal or confederal British polity where England, Scotland, Wales, one part of Ireland, and the micro-states, obtain equality of status and agree on common rules and norms, and shared representation where this is appropriate? As things stand right now, the answer has to be: 'no'. While such formulae are easy to imagine, they are difficult to sustain for long in practice because of one factor: 'England'—at once the largest component of any such state, yet without any separate political identity or institutions whatever and still so merged into a discredited Britain that few will even contemplate de-merger; or if they do, only via the shudder of a deprived, somehow shrunken 'little England'. New Labour's 'Council of the Isles' disappeared within months, when it became obvious that it could never function without more serious reform of the central power-apparatus, including its electoral system. In practice, therefore, the current turning away from Britishness has no alternative except straightforward independence, or separation—or (for the Scots) reversion to nation-state business as usual.

The move is depicted by Anglo-American leaders and Consuls as 'radical', extremist, and so on, but such phrases are self-serving rhetoric. To anyone like myself, following events from far away and returning only now and then for re-immersion, something else is far more noticeable. This is what I can only describe as mounting matter-of-factness. From the sixties through into the nineties of last century, most debate on nationalism was conducted in a furnace of mutual loathing and recrimination. Passions could hardly have been more intense—especially on the side of threatened Britishness. In Scotland, this led to institutional hatreds and vendetta-like feuds between SNP nationalists and British-Labour loyalists. Now, however, the returning native finds relative composure, and even a degree of resignation. 'Pros' and 'cons' are today—which now does

mean almost every single day—listed and contrasted quite equably, in an atmosphere occasionally testy or bitter, but quite free from the explosive incriminations and lifetime sentences of a decade ago.

The passion of 'Britishness' has lost all weight and gravitas, except in Gordon Brown's sermons, or in strained liberal attempts to promote a civic patriotism supposedly inseparable from Britishness. As a consequence, a real openness has appeared, much more favourable to independence. This is why the Scottish Catholic electorate (about 17–18 per cent, Scotland's biggest cultural minority) has been drawn to vote for nationalism—and, of course, why Cardinal O'Brien appears so reconciled to independence 'before too long', as the *Scotsman* reported in October 2006. It is also why (as Fry's book and *Prospect* piece suggest) Conservatives are finding themselves in an analogous situation. Few now expect Great Britain to make a phoenix-like reappearance at the next UK general election; but nobody at all expects Cameron's neo-Toryism *not* to win in England.

Fry's book brings to mind a particularly revealing incident in recent Scottish history. In December 1992, when the European Council heads of government were meeting in Edinburgh, a big demonstration was organized in the heart of the city, the Meadows Park. Its aim was to remind delegates that a nation was missing from the assembly, one that wanted to be heard again. An open-top double-decker bus was used as a platform among the trees, and novelist William McIlvanney gave from there what became the most memorable address of the day. Neal Ascherson has provided an equally memorable account of it in *Stone Voices*:

And then, in a tone of tremendous pride, he said this: 'We gather here like refugees in the capital of our own country. We are almost seven hundred years old, and we are still wondering what we want to be when we grow up. Scotland is in an intolerable position. We must never acclimatize to it, never! Scottishness is not some pedigree lineage *This is a mongrel tradition!*' At those words, for reasons which perhaps neither he nor they ever quite understood, the crowd broke into cheers and applause which lasted on and on. What survives from those moments on the Meadows are his proclamation of Scotland the mongrel, and the joy these words released.

I was present at the event, and can recall the sensation vividly. It is true that nobody quite understood the thrill that made every nerve in the Meadows tingle. But that was because McIlvanney had touched something far deeper than the terms and conscious aspirations that had brought the crowd together, and still formed the official discourse of the day. He had broken through onto some unclaimed terrain, and given provisional voice to a pack of mongrels by rejecting the very idea of a pedigree 'lineage' (or ethnicity). He was speaking for people in a field or on a hillside, from nowhere or



anywhere, with mud on their shoes and rain in their faces—yet some kind of different covenant in their hearts.

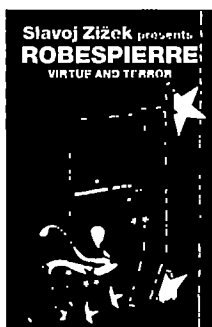
That was only three years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, and globalization was still in its infancy. But in retrospect, wasn't it already fostering something different, far beneath the official chorus-lines of free trade and deregulation? Mongrelhood is also the asymmetric obverse of the older, uniformed identities of state and nationhood. In the Scottish context, it is also curiously like the positive assertion of what had been lacking since 1707: 'self-confidence', whose desolating absence was somehow converted into a virtue, even a sort of strength. The joy came from that acknowledgment of something real, the sudden awakening of a feeling that Scottish half-life was no longer fate—plus the obscure sense that altering circumstances might yet favour this change, rescuing it from the confines of pedigree and repetition. In Emma Rothschild's very apt phrase, a world of 'foundlings' was already on the rise, to which even a disabled country might hope to belong. Globalization does not make all nations disappear, or become equally small. But it does make some permanently and irreversibly 'smaller', in the sense of rendering older styles of imperium and domination impossible. At bottom, the reason may be quite simple: in the new global dimension, not only are there vastly more mongrels than pedigree hounds—this was of course always the case—but the former cannot help acquiring voice and presence. Hence a process of democratic warming is going on, alongside global warming. And on that foundation, 'anti-globalism' is less an opposite than a modification of globality, and of the distinct yet open societies that will alone make the global tolerable. The 'ism' was the trouble, not the opening-up.

And new foundlings may be particularly useful in formulating these. In his account of the origins of modern Scotland, Fry several times makes the interesting point that Scottish anti-Union parliamentarians were not arguing for pedigree-preservation and protection, or the erection of new barriers, in 1706–07. On the contrary, some were demanding free trade, equal treatment and openness, and others a solution like the Netherlands United Provinces—with both perceiving the retention of national identity as necessary for such answers. The Union, on the other hand, stood for something simpler: 'incorporation' (the unvarying watchword of its devotees). That is, cementing troublesome diversity into one increasingly successful but quasi-mercantilist system: the armed imposition of laws convenient to its leadership, prosperity and empire.

*The Union* describes the process, and ends by arguing that it is time for our little country to de-incorporate itself. All genuine mongrels will agree with Fry on this. There is also a case for the more general and theoretical redefinition of what could be called the scale of nationhood. After a long

period during which bigger was in some ways better, with the initial rise of industrialization and the diffusion of global commerce, globalization may have inaugurated another, in which smaller is, if not better, then at least just as good (and occasionally with the advantage over the erstwhile great, the muscle- and hidebound). The age of the body-builders has ended, as that of dinosaurs once did; that of smaller mammalian fitness is still being worked out. Is it really surprising that the United Kingdom should be one prime site for this to happen?

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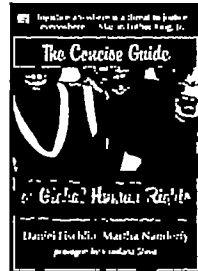
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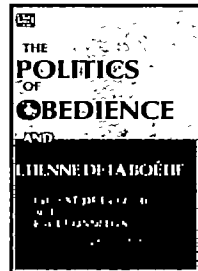
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Paul Handley, *The King Never Smiles: A Biography of Thailand's Bhumibol Adulyadej*

Yale University Press: New Haven and London 2006, \$38, hardback  
499 pp, 0 300 10682 3

DUNCAN MCCARGO

## A HOLLOW CROWN

Royalty from twenty-five nations gathered in Bangkok in June 2006 to celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of the reign of King Bhumibol Adulyadej. The festivities culminated in a magnificent river ceremony on 9 June, when fifty-two traditional wooden barges, their bows bearing gilded figures of deities and mythical beasts, manned by over two thousand oarsmen, coursed along the capital's Chao Phraya River. Crowds up to a million strong, most of them wearing yellow—Thais colour-code the days of the week; the King was born on a Monday—lined the riverbanks. Many sported special commemorative wristbands with the slogan 'We love the King' in both Thai and English. The world's longest reigning monarch, draped in a shimmering golden robe, was greeted by a twenty-one-gun salute, fireworks, banners and festive music. It was an image of perfect royal harmony; the Thai genius for hospitality and display had captured global media attention, while the King himself was not only loved by all but profoundly respected for his shining virtue, wisdom, sincerity and personal modesty.

Yet much was rotten in the state of Thailand. The spectacle of national unity was itself a move in a bitter and far-reaching power struggle between the Palace and the Prime Minister, controversial telecommunications tycoon Thaksin Shinawatra, elected by a landslide under the new 1997 constitution. Even the ubiquitous yellow shirts were highly political. The fad for wearing yellow had been launched in September 2005, when maverick media baron and former Thaksin apologist Sondhi Limthongkul began mobilizing popular resistance against the Prime Minister at a series of rallies. Yellow shirts proclaiming 'We love the King' and 'We'll fight for the King' became a symbol of the anti-Thaksin movement. Thaksin tried to deflect the symbolism

by adopting the colour himself in late November 2005, calling on all Thais to wear yellow shirts to celebrate the royal anniversary and pledging allegiance to the crown. But his move backfired. During 2006, after Thaksin's scandal-ridden sell-off of the privatized telecoms network to Singaporean interests, much of the nation donned clothing that was an implicit rebuke to the Prime Minister. In February 2006, Thaksin announced on his Saturday radio programme that he would step down if the King whispered in his ear, but subsequently failed to take a number of hints.

Bhumibol's sixtieth anniversary celebrations marked the next step in the legitimacy showdown between the two, one that would lead to the inexorable triumph of the King. On 23 June Thaksin wrote in an extraordinary private letter to President Bush that certain interest groups in Thailand, 'having failed to provoke violence and disorder', were 'now attempting various extra-constitutional tactics to co-opt the will of the people.' On 30 June, he publicly accused an unspecified 'charismatic individual' of manoeuvring to oust him from the premiership—a comment widely assumed to refer to the King himself. The power struggle culminated in the military coup d'état of 19 September 2006 that overturned the constitution to oust Thaksin, amid accusations that his government had showed a persistent disrespect to the monarchy bordering on *lèse-majesté*. Well-wishers tied yellow ribbons to guns and tanks, recognizing that the coup was staged at the Palace's behest. The junta proceeded to install Surayud Chulanont, a member of the royal Privy Council, as interim Prime Minister. Thailand's revered King, the semi-divine Buddhist *dharmmaraja*, was a major player in the politics of the country.

Who is Bhumibol? Paul Handley's biography is, remarkably, the first serious, independent study of the King. The book is the fruit of twelve years' work, most of them spent as a Bangkok-based correspondent for the *Far Eastern Economic Review*. For a credible foreigner—above all, an American—fluent in Thai, to publish a long, meticulously researched account that is critical of the monarch, and with Yale University Press, no less: this is the worst nightmare of the guardians of the Chakri dynasty. Strict *lèse-majesté* laws, carrying a 15-year jail sentence, limit all public discussion of the Crown. The Thai authorities desperately hoped Yale would refrain from publishing the book. Cabinet Secretary Borwornsak Uwanno travelled to the United States to meet Yale alumni such as George H. W. Bush, and a leading American law firm was contacted. The legal advice was that publication could not be blocked; but as a concession, Yale delayed the release of the book from May until July 2006, when the main royal festivities were over. In publishing it, Handley knows that he will never be allowed back in the country.

Yet his book is cathartic: finally, someone has dared to say the unsayable, and those trying to understand Thai society have a new intellectual

reference point from which to work. Fluently written and grounded in very considerable research, Handley's account draws on insights into the Thai monarchy from a range of scholars and writers, including Christine Gray, Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian and MR Sukhumbhand Paripatra. But his narrative moves far beyond the parameters of these precursors. It has a salience and an urgency well beyond that of any ordinary biography (leave alone William Stevenson's error-strewn 1999 hagiography, *The Revolutionary King*), since its real subject-matter is the re-imagining of Thailand's modern political history.

Where Handley excels is in his understanding of Bhumibol as a political actor, as the primary architect of a lifelong project to transform an unpopular and marginalized monarchical institution—on the verge of abolition more than once—into the single most powerful component of the modern Thai state. As a journalist, Handley's strength has always been his coverage of Southeast Asian business, his brilliantly intuitive grasp of the seedy interplay between money and power in both Indonesia and Thailand. The sections of the book that will most disturb attentive Thai readers are those focusing on the extensive business activities of the royal family through the asset-rich Crown Property Bureau. While preaching a homespun philosophy of the 'sufficiency economy', the King owns the freeholds of many of the prime Bangkok locations leased to leading real-estate developers and shopping mall proprietors. *The King Never Smiles* is not on sale in Thailand and has never been openly discussed in the Thai media, although numerous copies are circulating privately among the Bangkok intelligentsia. Conversations about the monarchy will never be quite the same again.

Bhumibol Adulyadej—the name means 'Strength of the Land, Incomparable Power'—was born in Boston, Massachusetts in 1927, making him a rare example of a foreign monarch who is technically eligible to become President of the United States. The Chakri dynasty was then at a low ebb. Absolute monarchy reached its peak during the long reign of King Chulalongkorn (1868–1910), Rama V, who emulated European powers by subordinating his subjects under a centralized modern bureaucracy, and was popularly credited with averting the direct colonization of Siam. But the vagaries of primogeniture then threw up the fickle and profligate Rama VI, who frittered away the monarchy's financial and political capital, while failing to produce an heir. When he died in 1925, his successor King Prajadhipok, Bhumibol's uncle, proved at best a half-hearted *dhammaraja*. Modernization was generating new political demands. As early as 1885, members of Siam's Western-educated elite had petitioned for a parliamentary constitution. In the 'revolution' of 1932 the absolute monarchy was challenged head on. In its wake the 42-year-old Prajadhipok, unable to grasp

the nature of Siam's changing society, abdicated—a year before Edward VIII—and retired to Surrey.

The unprecedented abdication abruptly elevated Bhumibol's older brother Ananda to the throne. The boys were only half-royal, since their doctor-father Prince Mahidol had married a commoner. After Massachusetts, they spent much of their early life in Switzerland, receiving a European education at an elite Catholic school in Lausanne. They learnt French, English, Latin and German, but could barely speak Thai. Handley describes photographs of Ananda and Bhumibol showing 'two slight, cheery and curious boys', though Bhumibol's robust health contrasted with Ananda's frequent illnesses. As they entered adulthood, he notes, 'both were better suited for the life of well-heeled *bon vivants* in Europe than golden-robed, sacral princes in an impoverished tropical Asian state.' Handley offers some nice images of Bhumibol's pre-lapsarian youth after the family returned to Bangkok for Ananda's coronation in December 1945:

Outside the palace, the Mahidol brothers attended sports matches and went on holidays to Ayutthaya and Hua Hin. Inside the Bangkok palace, they had recent American movies to watch and a collection of musical instruments to play. The Free Thai [Movement] gave Ananda a US Army jeep, which he and Bhumibol would spin around the many throne halls and chapels inside the Grand Palace's high white-washed ramparts. Some evenings, too, they drove around the city incognito.

Bhumibol's life of leisured frivolity was brought to an abrupt end in June 1946, when Ananda was found dead in Bangkok's Grand Palace, killed by a single bullet to the head. The incident has never been satisfactorily explained, and though Handley lays out various theories he concludes that there is insufficient evidence to support any of them. From the outset, the reign of Rama IX has been framed by tragedy—perhaps one reason why the King of Asia's 'land of smiles' is rarely seen to smile in public.

Bhumibol assumed the throne at a difficult political juncture. None of the modernizing forces—the nationalist militarists grouped around Field Marshal Plaek Phibun Songkhram, or the left-liberals led by Pridi Bhanomyong—had much use for the monarchy. Not until the 1950s did Bhumibol find a real role for himself: serving as a legitimating force for an American-backed military regime that saw Thailand as a bulwark against the spread of communism in Southeast Asia. In 1956 he began testing his political muscle against Phibun Songkhram in radio broadcasts and speeches. Senior courtiers such as Privy Councillor Srivisarn Vacha began articulating the idea that, as Handley paraphrases, 'constitutionalism aside, only the blue-blooded Chakris could ever truly serve the needs of the Thais. To them, this was real democracy.'



In 1957 Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat assumed power in a coup d'état that—like many subsequent putsches—received swift approval from the throne. In Sarit, as Handley puts it, the palace had finally found its strongman; the dictator acted as 'royal enforcer', strictly applying lèse-majesté laws, while the palace turned a blind eye to Sarit's corruption. Whereas Sarit saw the monarchy as a junior partner that could underpin military dominance, Bhumibol collaborated with Sarit to enhance his own standing, and expand the scale of royal charitable and business activities. The King toured the countryside accompanied by his beautiful consort, Queen Sirikit, who presented him with four children in quick succession. This model family won admiration from the rural masses, as did the King's intense involvement in the micro-management of socio-economic development, informed by a fascination with agriculture and irrigation. In a spirit of *noblesse oblige*, Bhumibol devoted considerable energies to such ideas, which he was to refine in the 1990s into a 'new theory' of 'sufficiency economy' that envisaged contented peasants largely withdrawing from modern capitalism to tend their plots. The sufficiency economy is to this day regularly lauded by bureaucrats, politicians and business leaders, while in reality Thai capitalism grows ever more rampant.

As the bloated armed forces became increasingly isolated from Thailand's rapidly changing society, Bhumibol gained greater political clout. Fuelled initially by agribusinesses capitalizing on the amazing fertility of the central plains, the Thai economy expanded rapidly from around 1960 onwards, though at the expense of traditional farmers. Bangkok mushroomed, while ex-farmers from the Northeast and other frontier regions poured into the cities in search of work. Foreign investors opened factories. A growing university sector catered to socially mobile youngsters open to anti-American, leftist ideas. Bhumibol worked hard to maintain Thailand's forward role in the Cold War. Handley describes a trip to Washington in 1966, where the King 'lobbied the United States to escalate its war against Hanoi, even criticizing Washington for pausing in its air strikes on North Vietnam.' He fervently endorsed the counter-insurgency against the Communist Party of Thailand. The country's politics during this period was framed by wider events in Indochina:

For the palace, the final straw was the abolishment of the monarchy in Laos by the Pathet Lao on December 2, 1975, three days before Bhumibol's 48th birthday. He and most of the extended royal family were horrified, for the Thais saw the Laotian monarchy as a sister throne sharing the same traditions, history and even bloodline. Vientiane's fall was the final catalyst that sent Thailand back to military rule.

The Palace had become ever more closely identified with far-right elements such as the Village Scouts and Red Gaur in the turbulent years after October 1973, when a popular uprising removed the ruling generals. Handley gives detailed attention to this heady period, and to the events of October 1976, when the King backed the return to Thailand of Thanom Kittikachorn, one of the generals ousted in 1973. Described as 'a personal favourite of the king', Thanom was immediately ordained as a monk at a royal-sponsored temple. His arrival helped inspire a violent backlash against the leftist student movement, culminating in a massacre at Thammasat University led by Palace-backed groups. The collusion of the Palace in the October 1976 violence gives the lie, he argues, to the myth of Bhumibol as benevolent democrat. During the following three decades, the King regularly poured scorn on the corruption, incompetence and greed of elected politicians, in contrast to the dedication and sincerity of the monarchy and armed forces.

Handley describes the 1980s as marking 'a new era of adulation for the throne', fostered above all by ex-general Prem Tinsulanond, who served as Prime Minister from 1980 to 1988, despite never being elected, and subsequently as the King's principal fixer; he is currently President of the Privy Council. A series of scandals and pro-democracy protests eventually pressed Prem into resigning, but Bhumibol frequently criticized the civilian government that succeeded him, and in February 1991 approved yet another military coup. Handley devotes an entire chapter to the stand-off in the spring of 1992 between the generals and protesters calling for democratic and constitutional reform. In May, the government called in troops to disperse the demonstrations, killing several dozen. After an ambiguous silence, Bhumibol summoned both the military dictator Suchinda Kraprayoon and the leader of the Confederation for Democracy, Chamlong Srimuang, for a televised audience that led to Suchinda's exit and brought the violence to a halt—a monarchical *deus ex machina*.

Royalists have persistently sought to portray Bhumibol as an asset in Thailand's long and tortuously winding road to democracy, resting their case primarily on his interventions 'on the side of the people' in October 1973 and May 1992. On both occasions, belated royal moves contributed to the departure of military-aligned governments. But Handley's close scrutiny of these episodes suggests that the King's actions were ultimately self-serving, promoting his image as a god-like *dharmmaraja*. He offers compelling arguments that Bhumibol persistently favoured weak governments of doubtful competence, inept and usually short-lived regimes that left his own influence and mystique unchallenged. Regarding the events of 1992, he contends that 'Bhumibol's skill in saving the day . . . helped to hide his

consistent bias against protesters and popular movements'. Handley's core argument, in fact, is that he was never much of a democrat:

efforts to depict the monarchy as innately democratic faced an important challenge: Thais understood democracy to involve elections of the people's representatives, a qualification that eluded the king. In response, the palace simply maintained that all Chakri kings were popular kings, who would not have stayed on the throne had they not maintained the people's support or been guilty of misrule. By that logic, Bhumibol and his predecessors on the throne were essentially elected. As he told an interviewer, 'I am really an elected king. If the people do not want me, they can throw me out'.

The question will be posed with renewed intensity under Bhumibol's successor. Handley is no Kitty Kelley, but he does not flinch from dealing with the Thai royals' messy family matters, especially the various marriages and liaisons of Crown Prince Vajiralongkorn and two of his sisters. Though not much to the taste of this reviewer, chapters 16 and 20 contain more than mere tittle-tattle. The outcomes and offspring of these—mostly failed—relationships testify to the core problem afflicting the Thai monarchy. Thais generally despise the notoriously mercurial and meddling former King Norodom Sihanouk of neighbouring Cambodia; but for all his faults as a ruler, Sihanouk abdicated in 2004 in favour of his son Sihamoni, arguably the best-qualified candidate for the job. Despite his success in restoring the lustre of the throne, Bhumibol has failed to address the fact that Vajiralongkorn commands scant respect among the populace, and the prospect of his accession fills most of his subjects with dread. As Handley puts it: 'Thais recognize these weaknesses in the prince's kingly credentials. No one puts Vajiralongkorn's picture on their wall, and few seek out his amulets or want to donate to his charities'.

A problem that plagues all attempts to analyse the roles of the Thai monarchy is the question of agency: how far is the King himself responsible for the way he is presented to the public, for the political adventurism carried out on his behalf, or for the business deals of the Crown Property Bureau? Handley arguably focuses too much on the person of Bhumibol, underestimating the extent to which—certainly by the 1990s—the interests of the monarchy worked largely on auto-pilot, managed by a loose network of figures such as Privy Council President Prem, dubbed the King's 'surrogate strongman' by one Thai scholar. The octogenarian ex-cavalry general is a taciturn bachelor possessed of a peerless list of mobile phone numbers; he continues to exert considerable influence over official appointments. No one can refuse to take Prem's calls, and few dare to deny his requests, since he is generally assumed to be asking on behalf of the King. But Thailand's 'network monarchy' (my own coinage) extends far beyond Prem, the Privy

Council, the military and the bureaucratic elite. It embraces the business sector, academics, journalists and social activists, some of whom have direct connections with the Palace, and some of whom are simply self-appointed guardians of royal interests.

Handley seems reluctant to accept that it was the 'network monarchy' that, with other political actors, agreed the deal to broker the 1997 'people's constitution'. The new constitution amounted to an important elite bargain, designed to subordinate politics to rules of the game in readiness for the inexorable crisis in which Bhumibol's reign must terminate—that of the succession. Unlike its predecessors, the 1997 constitution—legislated in the wake of the Asian financial crisis of that year—generated immense public interest and enjoyed a high measure of legitimacy. Prominent royalists such as former premier Anand Panyarachun and social reformer Dr Prawase Wasi, who might be dubbed the 'liberal wing' of the network monarchy, played a key role in negotiating this elite pact. On 2 November 1995, I heard Prawase declare to a crowded Bangkok ballroom that Thailand urgently needed a new constitution, to help avert the potential calamity of political violence following Bhumibol's death. None of the media outlets represented in the room dared report this highly sensitive speech, one of the few occasions on which network monarchy raised a head above the Palace parapet.

In this alternative reading, by 1997 Bhumibol may have recognized and implicitly accepted the limitations of the *dhammaraja* model and the need for greater democracy. The subsequent rise of Thaksin Shinawatra, whose 2001 and 2005 landslide election victories fuelled his hubris, encouraging him to challenge the power of the Palace, may have inspired a renewed royal mistrust of electoral politics, and provided a green light for the coup. More than any other prime minister, Thaksin apparently saw the position of the monarchy as an obstacle to Thailand's development, and sought to roll back royal authority. Handley notes that Thaksin 'was willing publicly to snub the throne, as well as play royal family members off against each other'. In an article published since his book appeared, Handley has argued that the September 2006 coup reflected Bhumibol's fears that Thaksin could not be trusted to handle the delicate royal succession. Yet by abrogating the 1997 constitution, the military intervention left the monarchy a dangerously isolated pillar in a landscape otherwise bereft of legitimating political institutions.

The coup cast Thailand alarmingly adrift. The new Prime Minister, General Surayud, apparently believed that royal backing and his own moral standing would place his interim government above criticism. Instead, the administration watched Thailand's violence-stricken, Muslim-majority southern provinces—where almost 2,000 have been killed since January 2004—move closer towards civil war. Work on drafting yet another

constitution was soon enmeshed in intractable politicking. Thaksin terrorized the government merely by giving an interview on CNN; his political allies regrouped. Foreign investors were spooked by new capital controls that seemed to imply a return to economic nationalism, and bombs exploded in Bangkok on New Year's Eve. The Palace-backed coup had quickly proved calamitous.

The greater calamity of the succession lies ahead. The elderly King is in poor health, and spends most of the year as a semi-recluse at his seaside palace in Hua Hin. The *dharmmaraja*'s powers are waning; in 2006 the royal whisper proved insufficient, and it took a crude military intervention to remove Thaksin from office. Paradoxically, Bhumibol is a victim of his own success, having created unrealistic expectations of Thailand's throne. Existing monarchical networks are not sufficiently well institutionalized to outlive the current king. Handley observes that:

with Bhumibol's eventual passing, the monarchy's desacralization will probably begin. His heirs are not conditioned to act as incipient Buddhas, nor do their personalities fit the mold. They must evolve and remake the throne themselves before they are forced to do so by the media and a generation of better-educated Thais.

Handley has written an important book, one that has already generated considerable debate, both inside and outside Thailand. For many Thai readers, and for a certain kind of foreigner, Handley has transgressed simply by authoring a biography that treats Bhumibol as an ordinary figure who has spent much of his life securing his own position and reshaping the politics of his country. Indeed, a number of reviews were posted on Amazon before the book was published, by people who had yet to read a word of it; bizarrely, Handley has even been accused of writing at Thaksin's instigation. Many responses have been emotional and (often unselfconsciously) political, rather than critiques of the book *per se*.

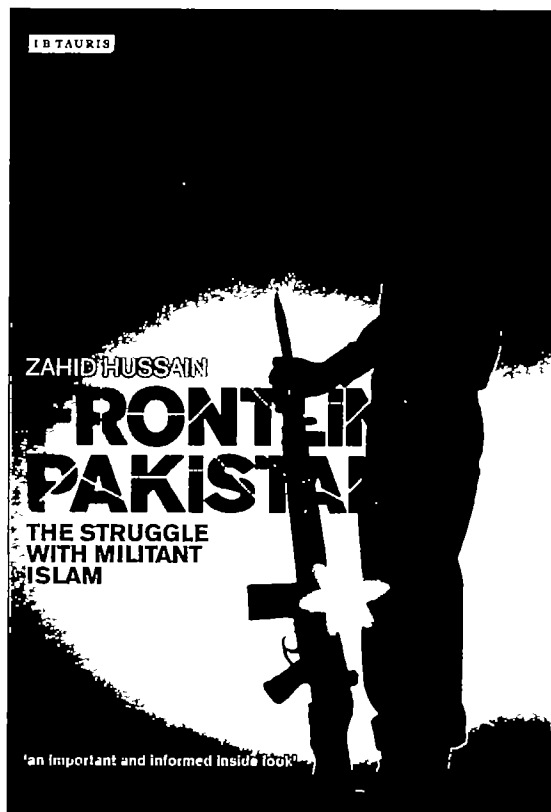
Such attitudes are not restricted to conservative Thai royalists. In a 1972 article, anthropologist Herbert Philips explained that American scholarship on Thailand was 'a scholarship of admiration'; reverence for the Thai monarchy has underwritten virtually all international commentary and analysis. Despite or because of their republican history, Americans appear to have a special weakness for monarchies. The *lèse-majesté* laws notwithstanding, the cult of personality that surrounds the King rarely requires legal enforcement. Even casual visitors to Thailand are warned not to make any disparaging comments about the monarchy, while foreign journalists and scholars are tipped the wink early on by their local contacts and counterparts. In this context, Handley's moves to undermine decades of propaganda and mystique surrounding the royal institution border on sacrilege. If it

seems extraordinary that Handley's is the first independent study of King Bhumibol, stranger still is the extent to which, in an era of unprecedented openness, royalist hegemony has assumed a form of global reach. Thailand badly needs more free debate about the role of its monarchy, including the relative merits of *dhammaraja* and democracy. Suppressing the expression of collective anxieties about the succession only makes the impending crisis more likely.

Whatever some readers may prefer to believe, Handley's book is not a hatchet job; in many passages, the author displays an evident empathy with his subject. Writing of the May 1992 crisis, he observes: 'the modern constitutional king's most important role is to mediate in insoluble circumstances and take up leadership when it is absent. Bhumibol did this with unquestionable skill'. Although Handley seems distinctly sceptical about the prospects for a full-blown royal makeover, he ends by calling for a monarchy that is 'socially engaged', and recognizes achievement instead of rewarding loyalty. His preference is for a more 'modern' and 'inclusive' kingship, in effect, a 'people's monarchy' to match the now-lost 1997 people's constitution. Perhaps such a transition might be more feasible if Bhumibol were to follow Sihanouk's lead, by naming his own successor before he departs.

The ever-more-vocal cult of Bhumibol, meanwhile, seems intended to drown out anxious mutterings about the succession. When millions of Thais donned yellow shirts in June 2006, their euphoria ill masked a mode of collective denial concerning the future of the monarchy, the unstable political order and the country as a whole. In a kingdom where violence lurks just below the surface—violence that the King helped quell in 1973 and 1992, but tacitly supported in October 1976—Bhumibol's passing threatens to inaugurate a new episode of civil strife. In the post-Bhumibol era, the monarchy may no longer offer a source of stability and continuity. No political order can safely invest its long-term stability in a single individual, however skilled, and however wise.

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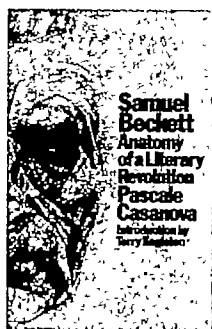
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CHRISTOPHER PRENDERGAST

## FROM ARRAS TO THERMIDOR

Synthesize the numerous biographies of the leaders of the French Revolution during the high period of radical Jacobinism, and perhaps the first thought to emerge is what an improbable collection of characters they were. Ruth Scurr begins her biography of Robespierre with the masterly understatement: 'Political turmoil can foster unlikely leaders'—indicating that, at a deeper level of explanation, the sheer contingency of political fortunes at a time when traditional sources of authority and legitimacy were collapsing might be very much to the point. Joseph de Maistre famously described the Revolution as God's retribution for human folly; if so, His purpose in selecting precisely these individuals as the instruments of His vengeance remains profoundly inscrutable. Nothing here seems remotely foreordained or even moderately predictable. Danton, Marat, Fabre d'Eglantine, Saint-Just came out of nowhere: middle-class provincials with little or nothing in their backgrounds to suggest they were qualified for major parts in a great world-historical drama, and—especially in the cases of Fabre and Saint-Just—much to suggest that they were not. Paradoxically, given his own stress on the Rousseauist ideal of 'transparency', the most mysterious of them all was Maximilien Marie Isidore de Robespierre.

The prim lawyer from Arras, courteous, diligent, sartorially fussy, a trifle burdened by the shame of having been conceived out of wedlock, but altogether boringly conventional (Scurr represents him—a nice touch—as 'meticulously unflamboyant') was not on the face of it destined to become one of the chief architects of a political experiment whose 'meaning' has been debated ever since. True, even in Arras there were tentative signs of things to come: the lawyer with a burning sense of 'justice', prepared to

represent those who could not pay their legal fees and eloquently opposed to the death penalty. Drawing on his sister Charlotte's account, Scurr writes with sympathy of the six-year-old boy's character change after his mother's death: previously boisterous and light-hearted, he became 'serious, poised, responsible and diligent', preferring 'solitary pursuits like building model chapels or reading. He had a small collection of pictures and engravings that he liked to arrange in exhibitions for his sisters, delighting in their admiration.' In 1769, aged eleven, a Church scholarship took him to the Louis-le-Grand college in Paris, and his first encounter with the works of Rousseau, his 'mental companion for life'. (Scurr depicts as 'apocryphal', but 'too alluring to pass over', a possible meeting of the two: 'an attic in the rue Plâtrière: the author bedridden, the frail student breathless from climbing the stairs . . .') Maximilien distinguished himself sufficiently to be chosen, aged seventeen, to give the school address to the young King Louis XVI after his coronation in 1775. But, returning to Arras to practice law in 1781, Robespierre at his beginnings seemed destined for a humdrum existence in a provincial backwater.

That it was all to be otherwise rests on a historical joke of which the Cunning of Reason could have been proud. Robespierre's career could never have taken off without the machinations of the party of the Nobles in 1787. Faced with deadlock in their running dispute with the Absolutist state over the fiscal reforms brought forward by the King's successive chief ministers, Calonne and Brienne, they devised what they thought of as a smart ruse. Instead of continuing with the futile tactic of refusing to 'register' royal edicts (a traditional constraint on executive power), the Parlements—the juridical institution representing the interests of the nobles—simply declared themselves 'incompetent' in matters of taxation. The deadlock, they suggested, should be broken by the only body that could properly decide the matter, the Estates-General, which had not met since 1614. The belief was that, if reconvened, it would proceed as in 1614, with the two most powerful estates, the clergy and nobility, combining electoral forces to block the royal will. It was thus to be game, set and match to Privilege.

Its proponents, however, made one major error of political calculation; they assumed the docility of the Third Estate. Thus was set in train a sequence of events that would lead from the meeting of the Estates-General in May 1789 to the Third's self-declaration in June as a National Assembly and, after July 14, both the King's recognition of the new Assembly and the formal abolition of 'feudal' rights. As it turned out, game, set and match to the People, though not without substantial retranslations of the Tennis Court Oath further down the road. One of the deputies from Arras who arrived in Versailles for the May gathering (roughly one year later he spoke

of 'the hatred with which the aristocrats regard me') and who was to be at the very heart of those retranslations was Robespierre.

The rest is the extraordinary tale that has been rehearsed so many times, from so many points of view. That of conservative England was graphically depicted by John Wilson Croker in 1835: 'The blood-red mist by which his last years were enveloped magnified his form, but obscured his features. Like the *Genius* of the Arabian tale, he emerged suddenly from a petty space into enormous power and gigantic size, and as suddenly vanished, leaving behind him no trace but terror'. To this we might juxtapose Michelet's more companionable yet slightly eerie postscript to his great epic work, *Histoire de la Révolution française*, mourning, with the departure of his book for the press, the loss of 'my pale companion, the most faithful of them all, who had not left me from '89 to Thermidor; the man of great will, hard-working like me, poor like me, with whom I had, each morning, so many fierce discussions'. Michelet's discussions were fierce indeed; he certainly did not canonize Robespierre as a hero of the Revolution. Others proved more ardently hagiographic. Georges Sand, rarely at a loss for hyperbole, wrote that Robespierre 'was not only the greatest figure of the Revolution, but of all history'.

In 1828 Philippe Buonarroti, who had been appointed by Robespierre to organize expatriate Italians, published his account of Babeuf's 'Conspiracy of Equals', a text which enjoyed an astonishing longevity in revolutionary circles, perpetuating Jacobin ideas and Robespierre's example not only for the 1848 insurrections but also for Russian revolutionaries. Louis Blanc hailed Robespierre as a great revolutionary leader (but as a 'moderate' who was not to be associated with the Terror). Later Jaurès famously wrote: 'I am with Robespierre and go to sit next to him at the Jacobins'. Meanwhile Taine emerged as the standard-bearer of the right, describing Robespierre's progeny as 'the insatiable gasping mouth of the monster he has trained and bestrides'. Towards century's end, the debate would become a more specialized one, with the high-tension disputes between the two zealous guardians of revolutionary historiography, Aulard (pro-Danton) and Mathiez (pro-Robespierre).

But from the institution of Bastille Day in 1880 to the Bicentenary in 1989, official commemoration preferred to write Robespierre out of the script, thus 'remembering' the Revolution by conveniently forgetting the question Robespierre himself put with such devastating clarity: 'Citizens, do you want a revolution without a revolution?' It did to memory what the Thermidoreans had done with his bloody and mangled remains, dispatched to an unmarked grave and dissolved in quicklime. In 1978 François Furet duly declared the Revolution 'over'. Naturally, scholarly adjustments in the light of new research would still be required; but, to all intents and purposes,

the French Revolution was now essentially an archival matter. Bastille Day would continue as, on the one hand, a state-sponsored media event, serving the purposes of the political classes—military parade down the Champs-Élysées, Presidential address on television—and, on the other hand, a public holiday, understood simply as a day off work, with all felt sense of connection to revolutionary turmoil and transformation irretrievably lost.

However, the term 'over' referred to three quite distinct burial ceremonies. The long-range settlement issuing from the first revolution of 1789—national sovereignty, expressed through institutions of representative democracy—had fully bedded down as the 'normal' form of the modern polity, at least since the Third Republic; an achievement to be highly prized but now so taken for granted as no longer to warrant any special commemorative wonder. The other two revolutions, that of 1792, with the Insurrectionary Commune, the overthrow of the monarchy, the September Massacres and the proclamation of the Republic, and that of Year II—the Committee of Public Safety and the Revolutionary Tribunal—were 'over' in the sense of definitively consigned to oblivion. These were the blind alleys of the revolution, littered with corpses; they had nothing to offer posterity, either in practice or for memorial, and were best walled up and forgotten. Robespierre was off-limits. Simon Schama's *Citizens*, published for the 1989 Bicentenary, ends abruptly, with 9 Thermidor and the messy death of the 'fastidious prophet of Virtue' as just deserts, before proceeding to an epilogue taking us across the Atlantic to an altogether more congenial sort of revolution.

To Furet's touted theme of overness Scurr prefers the Zhou Enlai approach; her take on her subject rests on the view that the jury is still out. In a somewhat cramped field, she has produced a first-rate biography of Robespierre for the English-speaking world. Scurr's dispassionateness serves her well, and her book is in all sorts of ways a sustained achievement from first to last page, not least its weaving of Robespierre's life story into an account of the Revolution that is exemplary in its lucidity. The deputy from Arras, fired up by six weeks of intensive discussion among the representatives gathered in Versailles, was among those who greeted the women's march from Paris in October 1789. Scurr conveys a vivid sense of the crowded city, as the Assembly reconvened in Paris; of Robespierre's interventions in the debates on the monarchical constitution over the next two years—attacking the lack of democracy, the celibacy of priests, censorship of the press, capital punishment—and the nightly analysis in the crowded Dominican refectory nearby where the Jacobin Club met. Scurr gives a sensitive description of Robespierre's home life, lodging with a Jacobin carpenter's family, the Duplays, who adored him, and wonderful set pieces of the famous scenes. The royal flight to Varennes in June 1791, the National Guard shooting into the crowd of petitioners against the King on the Champs de Mars; the

heightening tension as Austrian and Prussian forces advanced on Paris to restore royalist order in the summer of 1792; the storming of the Tuileries, the trial of the King, the innumerable processions and festivals, trees of liberty, pikes and bonnets—all are strikingly evoked. If, for example, you want to know what it must have felt like to be Maximilien Robespierre on the day of his own creation, that strangest of republican rituals, the Festival of the Supreme Being, Scurr provides an unforgettable account.

Yet as she says, 'the real challenge' of a Robespierre biography lies deeper—'a question of interpretation that reaches down to the roots of modern democratic politics'. This takes us straight to the core issue on which the jury has still to make up its mind, reflected in her title: *Fatal Purity*, one way of representing the fateful link between Terror and Virtue. Scurr succinctly summarizes the former as a 'system of emergency government and summary execution', adding 'with which no-one was more closely identified than Maximilien Robespierre'. The two components are not identical. If the emergency government run by the Committee of Public Safety from 1793 was a dictatorship, it was in the unusual form of a dictatorship of deputies, fusing the legislative and executive branches in defiance of Montesquieu's doctrine of the separation of powers; but at a time when the ministries and administrative bureaucracies had become essentially dysfunctional, France was besieged by foreign powers, Paris racked by food shortages and the federalist revolt against the centre was agitating the countryside. This was not simply another version of arbitrary rule.

Summary execution—under the infamous Law of Prairial—was a different, if related, story, source of the view so memorably staged by Carlyle's incandescent prose of Robespierre the pathological monster, an aberration of gigantically repellent proportions. But Carlyle, being Carlyle, had more to offer than a simple rant, and his ever-inventive repertoire also gives us a far more intriguing description: 'the seagreen Incorruptible'. It is intriguing because of the odd qualifier, 'seagreen'. This is normally taken to refer to Robespierre's physical appearance, what one contemporary noted as his 'livid and bilious' complexion, and Mme de Stael described as the 'greenish hue' of his veins. Carlyle seems to have intended it in this sense (when the revolutionary going gets rough Carlyle shifts to 'tallowgreen'). But philology suggests another reading: 'seagreen' as derivative from Old English 'sen-green', the household leek; folk-etymologically deformed to 'seagreen', and thus evoking the notion of the 'evergreen', the moral sense of 'incorruptible'—Robespierre as the man who could never be bought—linked to the temporal sense of incorruptible, the everlasting status of the republic of virtue.

It is the relation in Robespierre's own mind between virtue and terror that takes us to the 'something deeper' which Scurr specifies as the central issue for Robespierre's biographer. Robespierre's philosophy turned

famously, or notoriously, on an ends-means argument. The end was the creation of the virtuous republic, where 'virtue' is to be understood in the classical-republican sense of public spiritedness. Terror was the necessary means to that end in revolutionary circumstances. In his famous speech to the Convention of 17 Pluviôse (5 February 1794) he declared:

If the basis of popular government in peacetime is virtue, its basis in a time of revolution is both virtue and terror—virtue, without which terror is disastrous, and terror, without which virtue has no power . . . Terror is merely justice, prompt, severe and inflexible. It is therefore an emanation of virtue, and results from the application of democracy to the most pressing needs of the country.

Robespierre would have had no time for Kant's view that mankind is constitutionally made of crooked timber. If it is crooked, this is but the historical effect of bad government, and it is the duty of revolution to straighten it out; the reign of virtue will be the reward of strenuous revolutionary endeavour.

But even on its own assumptions, Robespierre's thinking remained trapped within a logical aporia. The grammar of virtue straddled two tenses, future and present. On the one hand, virtue was a future object that only revolution can bring into being (this was revolution's *telos*). On the other hand, virtue was also a present requirement for the successful prosecution of the revolutionary enterprise. As simultaneously prospect and presupposition, the problematic of virtue inhabited a circle. Robespierre sought in part to square it, by maintaining that the People, being 'naturally virtuous', could be subtracted from this aporia, although some pretty robust policing was necessary to ensure that the beneficiaries of this natural endowment kept it in clear and steady focus; otherwise society threatened to splinter into what he called the 'hundred thousand fractions', where private interests overwhelm the public good. In one of his speeches he quotes Rousseau: 'the people want what is good, but they do not always see it'. But if, courtesy of bountiful nature, the People already has what the revolution is supposed to bring about, the same cannot be assumed of leaders, and still less of enemies. In respect of the former, eternal vigilance is imperative. In respect of the latter—which, in dire circumstances, can incorporate the former; a slide which sealed the fate of Danton in the wake of the *Compagnie des Indes* scandal—only terror will do.

In practice, the ends and means argument entailed the separation of justice from law. Since existing—*ancien régime*—laws are merely entrenched injustice, the creation of the just society necessarily involves the suspension of legality. This was a constant of Robespierre's thought. Foulon's lynching in the days following the storming of the Bastille elicited the comment:

'M. Foulon was hanged yesterday by the people's decree'. On the events of August 10, 1792 he observed: 'The Revolution is illegal: the fall of the Bastille and of the monarchy were illegal—as illegal as liberty itself'. At the trial of Louis XVI he ran the argument that 'a deposed king in the midst of a revolution as yet unsupported by just laws' cannot enjoy the customary protections of due process, adding that 'a people does not judge as a court of law'. This was the basis of what Scurr calls Robespierre's 'pact with violence'. The temporality of revolution—the revolution as transitional state of emergency—opened onto a wild zone of power, in which the task of a leader was to ensure that the People's 'justice' was implacably administered.

This, of course, is why the right has always hated Robespierre. But while it is invidious to play the numbers game, it remains correct to stress that, as political bloodshed goes, the total victims of the Jacobin death-machine were relatively small beer—some 1,300 were guillotined in the six weeks of June and July 1794, customarily seen as the height of the Terror—compared to what, in the carnage stakes elsewhere, Outrage has viewed with altogether greater equanimity. Nor is there any evidence to suggest that Robespierre took pleasure in killing. If there was something punitive to the psychic structure of his more ruthless impositions of 'virtue', there was nothing visceral to it. On the contrary, his relation to power was curiously bloodless even as he authorized the blood-letting. Carlyle's polemic—'acid, implacable-impotent; dull-drawling, barren as the Harmattan wind'—suggests one important insight into Robespierre's political character: the libido was not engaged.

Since Robespierre did not personally operate the guillotine nor take to the streets with the *sans-culottes* brandishing gun and pike, his particular means in the more general means-ends calculus were purely verbal and discursive. Without his speeches Robespierre would have had little direct influence on the course of events. J. M. Thompson remarked that for someone who, for a crucial period of the revolution, was its virtually unchallenged leader, Robespierre, notwithstanding his membership of the Committee of Public Safety, remained curiously detached from the machinery of government. His role was less quasi-ministerial than that of a 'spokesman'. If Robespierre invested so much time and energy in training himself to become an effective speaker, it was because he had grasped how important this was for mastering the arena of revolutionary politics. This was partly to do with the routines of the new politics, the debating and argumentative techniques essential to the great game of representation and constitution-making. But the niceties of constitutional considerations and lawyerly argument have little bearing on the chilling speeches for which he is above all remembered, those made between the overthrow of the monarchy and Thermidor, at the Jacobin Club, in the Convention, on the Committee of Public Safety. These

were interventions justifying a political practice—seen, by sympathizers, as ‘necessary’ in the sense of imposed by the circumstances of a real state of emergency; or, by detractors, as irredeemably abhorrent, a programme simply unrecognizable to any version of democracy based on the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen.

This is the stuff of Scurr’s later chapters, ‘The Pact with Violence’ and ‘Robespierre’s Red Summer’. Here she summarizes the content of the speeches, broadly along the lines of the ends–means argument. But the content only makes proper sense when placed in its political context: in the historically specific circumstances of trying—against superhuman odds—to keep revolutionary republicanism alive as a viable project. Scurr takes us crisply through the various narrative stages of this desperate struggle: the *levée en masse* to send some 700,000 to the front; the Convention’s dispatch of *représentants en mission* to quell Girondist federal revolts in the provinces; the mobilization of Hébertist *enragés* against Girondins in the capital, and then the turn against them to bring the city back under control. She shows in particular that the ‘pact with violence’ has to be understood more precisely as the pact with *popular* violence, although this is later re-described as ‘an implicit pact with street violence’, and sometimes what is evoked is merely ‘the crowd’ or ‘the mob’. The real issue of historical assessment here concerns the nature of Robespierre’s association with the *sans-culotte* movements and their organizational structure in the Paris Sections.

The one formal position that, along with his one-year service on the Committee of Public Safety, seems to have really mattered to him was his election to the Insurrectional Commune in August 1792. Yet it has never been fully clear whether this was from conviction, mere expediency, or a mix of both. Scurr is very good at showing that, for Robespierre, the Revolution meant nothing if it failed to protect the interests of the labouring poor; oppressed, at times to the point of near-starvation, not only by the remnants of ‘feudal’ privilege, but also from exposure to the ‘modernizing’ forces of the free market. Robespierre fully understood that this meant, and could only mean, ‘freedom’ for some. He supported the Maximum, but this changed little since its ceilings included wages as well as prices. Similarly, he supported restrictions on private property—‘It is not true that property can ever be held in opposition to man’s subsistence’—but did not question the institution of private property as such. As Scurr notes, for Robespierre redistribution came down essentially to progressive taxation, although for the time this was a genuinely radical proposal. The Girondins opposed it violently, on several grounds, including the claim that progressive taxation was the enemy of ‘equality’!

Nevertheless, on the political front, Robespierre was never fully comfortable with popular insurrection. A fair characterization might be that he was



a radical activist who came to distrust radical activism among the common people. Perhaps the most important turning-point in the Revolution came in the summer of 1793, when the *sans-culotte* Insurrectional Committee organized the siege of the Convention, demanding the arrest of the Girondin deputies; that is, the moment when the institution of representative democracy was challenged by the popular will in the name of direct democracy. Robespierre's attitude to this challenge was ambivalent and evasive. He supported the insurrection's demands for the arrest of the Girondins, but then promptly retired to his sick-bed. More generally, whenever it was an outright contest of wills between the Commune and the Assembly or the Convention, Robespierre erred instinctively on the side of caution.

The last document he signed was as a member of the Committee of the Commune, the text with the famously truncated signature RO. It has long been debated whether he dithered over the call to the Sections to resist the Convention, persuaded to sign just as the latter's armed guards burst into the room and half of Robespierre's jaw was blown away. But what is beyond dispute is that, when asked to sign, Robespierre posed the central question: 'in whose name?'. The answer he himself proposed was 'in the name of the French people'. From the outset, the term 'people' had always been a controversial one. When Mirabeau argued that the elected members of the National Assembly should be designated 'representatives of the French people', it was objected by lawyers that the word could be taken to mean either the *populus* or the *plebs*. Robespierre exploited both senses according to his particular purposes on any given occasion. Here the relevant sense—the term qualified by the national epithet 'French'—is clearly that of the *populus*; this is not what the Hébertists understood by the word.

Scurr does not go into the debate over the meaning of the truncated signature or the issue of legitimacy raised by the question 'in whose name?'. This is a pity because it might shed light on a tension in her argument. At one point she qualifies the 'pact with violence' as a manifestation of 'dangerous pragmatism', with its implication of political opportunism; but this sits uneasily with the more principled stress on 'purity'. Perhaps the tension is resolved by the terms of the ends-means philosophy. But there is still a real question as to whether, in Robespierre's mind, popular revolution was to be revolution by the People, or for the People, or in the name of the People. There is yet another aporia or black hole here: the People as simultaneously the instrumental means to an end and yet also itself the end, the Revolution's telos. Nor can a still more dubious possibility be ignored. 'I am the people', Robespierre declared in one of his more recklessly exuberant moments. Robespierre's theoretical understanding of democracy included elements of both the participatory and the representative conceptions. But his instinctive sympathy went less to the indirect mediations of representation—the

interests of the represented were all too easily betrayed by the self-interest of the representative—than to the principle of direct embodiment. The People embodied the General Will; but since the People's 'body' was not something that could be immediately apprehended, Robespierre's own body took its place. Scurr informs us that his modest rooms in the Duplays' house contained many mirrors, his full-length portrait, his bust and 'print after print of him all over the walls'—'a kind of shrine'. There is perhaps a political as well as a personal narcissism in play here: the prints and mirrors afforded so many spectral reflections of Robespierre's own person as the Revolution incarnate.

If there are ellipses in her account, Scurr has a sure feel for the idiom in which the travails, contradictions and ironies of the 'life' are best represented. The image favoured by those who detest Robespierre and everything he stood for is nightmare: the bad dream he created and which then engulfed him. A grander representation is that of tragedy. Even Carlyle approaches it in his depiction of Robespierre's convulsive end—'Oh Reader, can thy heart hold out against that?'. In a very different register, Furet too calls on the term 'tragic'; in his oft-cited formulation, 'the Revolution speaks through him its most tragic and purest discourse'. Scurr's notion of a purity that proved fatal—to himself as well as to others—travels a similar road, and in her concluding remarks she also reaches for the grand; of Robespierre's scream under the guillotine she writes that 'as a biographer I hear it as the agonized separation of Robespierre and the Revolution: the man and what he lived for'.

This image of agonized separation has the merit of keeping the grand inside the terms of history. Assessing Robespierre's part in the Revolution turns ineliminably on two kinds of judgement, which overlap and are often inextricable. Both involve Scurr's stress on a parting of the ways. The first has to do with historical understanding of a causal sort: did Robespierre's analysis of the state of emergency and his related political practice conspire to 'save' the revolution, such that his own extremities were among the necessary conditions of its being saved? They clearly did not, in the sense that the kind of political order he wanted did not come into being. In another sense, arguably he did 'save' it: a turning-point in the War of the First Coalition of the European monarchies against revolutionary France came at Fleurus in June 1794, a month before 9 Thermidor. Had the war gone the other way, the victorious 'enemies' at the gate would have lost no time in turning the clock back. This raises a further question, less analytical than evaluative, and belonging in the domain of preferences: whether the form of the revolution that was 'saved' was, all things considered, a better regime for modern human beings than the system that was swept away. Not everyone has agreed on this, though it is now only in some very small and peculiar

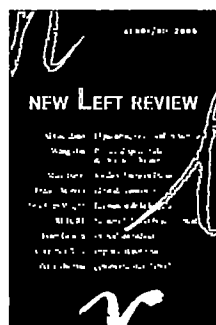
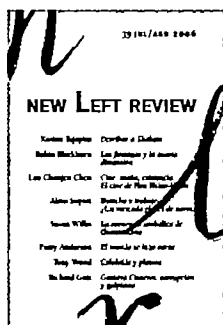
corners of the contemporary world that one still encounters a preference for the *ancien régime*. Even Zhou Enlai, while probably not the best placed person to guide us in the sphere of preferences—the last truly political invocation of July 14, 1789 was not on the Champs-Élysées but in Tiananmen Square—would presumably have agreed that, on this point at least, it was not too early to tell.

In his last speech to the Convention, as his support crumbled around him, Robespierre said: 'The French Revolution is the first to have been founded on the rights of humanity and the principles of justice'. There is an enduring, if rough and ready, consensus around this view. But Robespierre also added his own distinctive twist: 'other revolutions required only ambitions; ours requires virtue'. The conceptions of rights and justice that underpin modern democracies do not typically require invocations of virtue; more commonly, they tend to rationalize the triumph of what John Dunn has called the 'order of egoism', for which justice is primarily seen as the arena for some sort of rational adjudication of rights and interests. This is not what Robespierre wanted, altogether too 'impure', but it is what by and large we have got. The unfathomable causal question is whether, without Robespierre, we would have got it at all.

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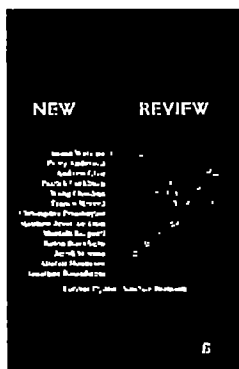
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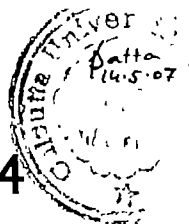
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MARCH APRIL 2007



## ARTICLE

CIHAN TUĞAL	Nato's Islamists	5
-------------	------------------	---

## POLEMIC

VLADIMIR POPOV	Russia Redux?	37
----------------	---------------	----

TONY WOOD	Putin's New Order	53
-----------	-------------------	----

## ARTICLES

FORREST HYLTON	Remaking Medellín	71
----------------	-------------------	----

PETER WOLLEN	On Gaze Theory	91
--------------	----------------	----

SVEN LÜTTICKEN	Idolatry and its Discontents	107
----------------	------------------------------	-----

STEPHEN GRAHAM	War and the City	121
----------------	------------------	-----

## BOOK REVIEWS

HENRY ZHAO	Contesting Confucius	134
------------	----------------------	-----

BARRY SCHWABSKY	Absolute Zero	143
-----------------	---------------	-----

CHRISTOPHER BROOKE	Light from the Fens	151
--------------------	---------------------	-----

# PROGRAMME NOTES

## CIHAN TUĞAL: Nato's Islamists

Analysing the current hegemony of Erdoğan's AKP in Turkey, Cihan Tuğal argues that the party has been the agent of a classic passive revolution, effectively shoring up the Kemalist state. Paradoxes of 'Americanization with Muslim characteristics', against the backdrop of Western military intervention in the Middle East.

## VLADIMIR POPOV: Russia Redux?

A balance-sheet of Russia's post-Soviet fortunes, placing the devastating collapse of the 1990s and recent revival under Putin in comparative context. Vladimir Popov warns of the dangers—overvalued currency, oil dependence, crumbling infrastructure—on the road ahead.

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BARRY SCHWABSKY on Kirk Varnedoe, *Pictures of Nothing*. Valedictory Stateside view of abstract art, shorn of its revolutionary beginnings and collective ambitions, from MoMA's former chief curator.

CHRISTOPHER BROOKE on Mark Goldie and Robert Wokler, eds, *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Political Thought*. Enlightenment thinking in France, Germany, England, Scotland and America, as seen by the heirs of Pocock and Skinner.

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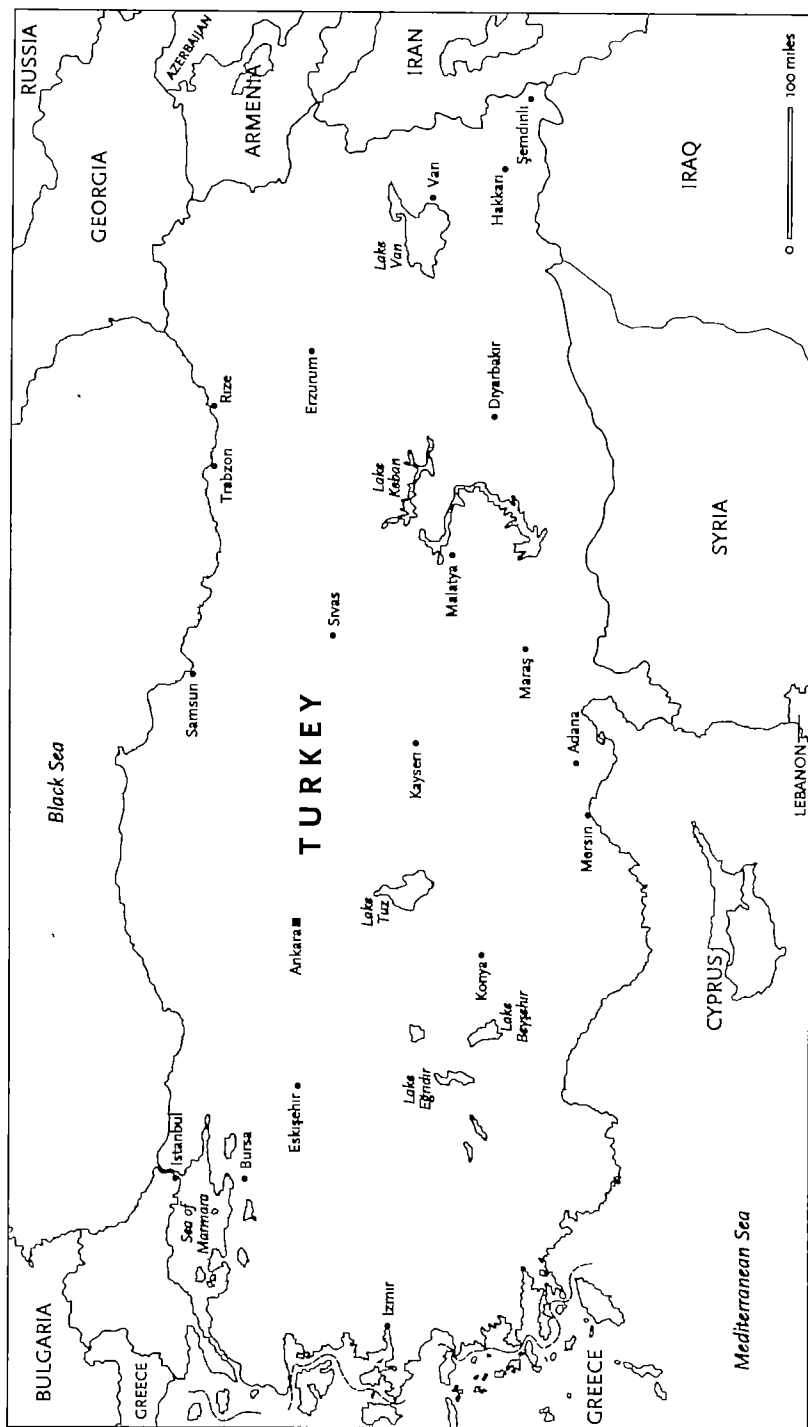
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## NATO'S ISLAMISTS

### *Hegemony and Americanization in Turkey*

THE TENSIONS CURRENTLY convulsing the Middle East—Western military offensive, Islamicized resistance, economic turbulence, demographic upheaval—have taken a peculiarly Americanized form in Turkey.<sup>1</sup> The secular Republic of Kemal Atatürk, NATO's longstanding bulwark in the region, is now ruled by men who pray. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (AKP)—the latest incarnation of a once-banned Islamist movement—has a 60 per cent majority in the Assembly, or Meclis, forming the first non-coalition government in Ankara for fifteen years. Prime Minister Erdoğan is himself a possible candidate for the presidency, a seven-year appointment in the gift of the Meclis under the Republic's notoriously unrepresentative democracy. Predictably, perhaps, though elected primarily by the votes of the poor—above all, the young, informal proletariat now crowding Turkey's cities—Erdoğan's government is slashing government spending, aiming at a fiscal surplus of 6 per cent of GDP in the coming year. Though proclaiming solidarity with the Muslim world, it has dispatched Turkish troops to join the UN occupation force in Southern Lebanon, and was only restrained from sending them to Iraq by the urgent pleas of the Iraqi-Kurdish President, Jalal Talabani. Yet the AKP is widely expected to win the Autumn 2007 elections, and has largely retained its support among provincial capitalists, the pious small bourgeoisie, the newly urbanized poor, important fractions of the police and much of the liberal, left-leaning intelligentsia.

To grasp the paradoxical nature of the changes in Turkey, it is first necessary to consider the peculiar meaning that 'secularism' (*laiklik*) has had for the Kemalist state. Between 1919 and 1923, with the defeated Ottoman





Empire effectively partitioned by the Entente powers, the founding wars for the Turkish Republic waged by Kemal's troops had appealed not only to the national liberation 'dream' of fatherland and freedom, but to the Muslim duty to resist the infidel occupation. Religious homogenization was an important constituent element of national unity, with the birth of the Republic attended by the expulsion of Orthodox Greeks, as pendant to the 1915 massacres of Armenians. The question, rather, was of the relation between religion and the state. In this sense, secularization—as expanding state control over religion—was a project of the 19th-century Tanzimat reforms. In 1924, the founding Constitution of the Republic retained Islam as the state religion, even as the Caliphate, fez, religious courts and schools, et cetera, were swept away and the Latin alphabet and Western legal code introduced; the clause was removed in 1928. Secularization was formally enunciated as one of the six principles of the Kemalist Republican People's Party's programme in 1931, and finally incorporated into the Constitution in 1937.

In the official view, rehearsed by many Western scholars, the 1924–25 modernizations constitute categorical proof of the disestablishment of religion in Turkey.<sup>1</sup> With Islam removed from every official public site, this argument runs, religious sectors of the population will eventually adapt to the ruling reality and become thoroughly secularized. Others have argued, however, that the Turkish state has controlled and institutionalized Islam, rather than disestablishing it.<sup>2</sup> Thus the (non-elected) Directorate General of Religious Affairs exercises a monopoly power over the appointment of preachers and imams throughout the country, and controls the distribution of sermons. In this view there are clear continuities between the Turkish Republic and the Ottoman system, where state and religion were deeply imbricated.

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Michael Burawoy, Dylan Riley and Aynur Sadet for helping me develop the ideas in this piece.

<sup>2</sup> The Western versions include Daniel Lerner, *The Passing of Traditional Society. Modernizing the Middle East*, New York 1967; and Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, New York 1961.

<sup>3</sup> See especially Simon Bromley, *Rethinking Middle East Politics: State Formation and Development*, Cambridge 1994; Metin Heper, *The State Tradition in Turkey*, Beverley, Yorkshire 1985; Nikki R. Keddie, 'Secularism and the State: Towards Clarity and Global Comparison', *NLR* 1/226, November–December 1997, pp. 300–32, and Şerif Mardin, 'Religion and Politics in Modern Turkey', in James Piscatori, ed., *Islam in the Political Process*, Cambridge 1983.

Arguably, however, Turkish secularization may best be seen as an ongoing struggle over the nature and development of an 'official Islam', characterized by the public use of religion for national cohesion. Rather than reproducing some universalist (or Ottoman) logic, the secularization project was continually remade, its (partially unintended) outcomes the result of a series of interventions by different social forces. This process has involved conflicts both within the ruling power bloc constituted by the reforms of the late Ottoman period and the early years of the Republic, and with social layers excluded from it. Since the 1930s, the dominant sectors within this bloc—the military leadership, the modernizing layers of the civil bureaucracy, an officially protected industrial bourgeoisie and a West-oriented intelligentsia—have favoured a more-or-less authoritarian exclusion of religion from the public sphere. The bloc's subordinate sector—conservative elements of the bureaucracy and professional middle class, an export-oriented bourgeoisie, merchants, provincial notables—tended to advocate a larger space for Islam, albeit still under 'secular' control. This could also mobilize broader popular layers—workers, peasants, artisans, the unemployed, small provincial entrepreneurs, clerics—against the dominant sector, and often succeeded in extracting concessions from it.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, although excluded from the power equation, the religious groupings themselves, as well as numerous semi-clandestine Islamic communities, put up quite powerful forms of passive or active resistance around questions such as education.

At the same time, these struggles to define the secularization process were themselves in part determined by the peculiarities of Turkish socio-economic development. The overwhelmingly Greek and Armenian merchant bourgeoisie of the Ottoman period had been virtually liquidated through war, population exchange and massacre.<sup>5</sup> The vast majority of Turks—over 70 per cent—were peasant smallholders, scattered in innumerable relatively self-contained villages. This left the military and civil bureaucracy as the only effectively organized forces capable of undertaking the social-engineering tasks of the new nation. Inevitably they tried to ensure the import-substitute industries they created served, first

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<sup>4</sup> The Kemalist Republican People's Party (CHP) has long been the political vehicle of the dominant, statist sector of this bloc, while the more traditionalist-religious layers have been represented by a variety of different parties since the end of single-party rule in 1950: Adnan Menderes's Democratic Party in the 1950s, Süleyman Demirel's Justice Party in the 1960s, Turgut Özal's Motherland Party in the 1980s and 90s.

<sup>5</sup> See Taner Akçam, *From Empire to Republic: Turkish Nationalism and the Armenian Genocide*, New York 2004.

and foremost, the national interest. To this end, both industrialists and factory workers were offered different forms of state protection, which for the latter included social security, collective bargaining, unionization and the right to strike. The manufacturing bourgeoisie, itself protected by heavy state subsidy against both internal and external competitors, tolerated these concessions in as much as they bolstered the development of a domestic market.<sup>6</sup> But by the late 1960s an increasingly self-organized working class soon threatened to break loose from state tutelage. The Turkish Workers' Party took 15 seats in Parliament in 1965.<sup>7</sup> Large-scale metalworkers' strikes led to a split in the state-sponsored union Türk-İş, culminating in the formation of the militant Confederation of Revolutionary Worker Unions, DİSK. As the left's power grew in the 1970s, the state backed both hard-right nationalist vigilantes and Islamist groups against them. Finally, from 1980, a military *coup d'état* put paid to the militant left with three years of state terror, during which executions, torture and imprisonment effected a permanent alteration in the political landscape.

### *Radicalization of Islam*

The military take-over of 1980 would also shift the vectors between religion, class and power. During the early 1970s, Islamist politics had mainly been the resort of small provincial entrepreneurs, on the defensive against state-industrial policies, rising labour militancy and rapid Westernization.<sup>8</sup> It was the lack of response of the established business organizations and parties to the needs of small enterprises, facing extinction in an import-substitution economy, that led the ex-president of the Union of Chambers, Necmettin Erbakan, to found the Milli Order Party (MNP), in 1970.<sup>9</sup> As well as defending the economic interests of

<sup>6</sup> Çağlar Keyder, *State and Class in Turkey: A Study in Capitalist Development*, London 1987.

<sup>7</sup> Dankwart Rustow, 'Turkish Democracy in Historical and Comparative Perspective', in Metin Heper and Ahmet Evin, eds., *Politics in the Third Turkish Republic*, Boulder, CO 1994, pp. 3–12.

<sup>8</sup> I define Islamism as an ideology that seeks to shape the state, the economy and society along Koranic lines. Islamism should thus be contrasted to more conservative understandings of the religion, which assign it a restricted and subordinate political role while stressing pious observance.

<sup>9</sup> In contemporary Turkey, the word *milli* implies both national and religious identity. Islamists utilize the ambivalence of this term to appeal to the Muslim identity of their constituency in a country where the only officially legitimate collective identity is Turkishness.

provincial businessmen and traders, the MNP also appealed to their religious feelings and their distaste for Western consumer culture. This stance won support from conservative peasant farmers and artisans, who were also attracted by Erbakan's rather sketchy programme of economic development based on communally owned private enterprise, shielded and regulated by the state. Closed down by the military in 1971, the MNP was refounded in 1972 as the Milli Salvation Party (MSP), with virtually no change in its programme.<sup>10</sup>

The MSP's most significant gain during the 1970s was increased freedom of operation for the country's İmam-Hatip schools, whose graduates would provide the main activists and leaders of the Islamist movement in the coming decades. These were officially intended to educate prospective preachers (*hatips*) and prayer leaders (*imams*). But since it was not possible for students to observe the precepts of Islam in regular public schools, they also attracted enrollment from religious families who did not necessarily want their children to become preachers or prayer leaders. In time, this generation of İmam-Hatip graduates came to occupy important public positions, constituting a religious middle class capable of competing with the secularist intelligentsia in economic, cultural and political realms. In a country where intellectuals had previously been equated with the left, the emergence of this new avowedly Muslim intelligentsia would be a significant element in the construction of Islamism as a hegemonic alternative.

The 1979 Iranian revolution came as a watershed for the Islamist movement. In the minds of many Muslims this mass upheaval, overthrowing one of the most oppressive Western-backed regimes in the region, shook the accustomed identification between Islam and obedience, and redefined Islamist politics as the revolutionary struggle of the *mustazafin*—the oppressed. This was an electrifying message for the impoverished young workers streaming towards the cities in hope of jobs. Under conditions of increasing inequality, the left was politically and ideologically absent after the 1980 military crackdown. The squatters of the neo-liberal period, who encountered the consumerist wealth of the city without being able to partake of it, could look neither to the social-revolutionary option that had mobilized earlier generations nor to the hope of joining an expanding industrial working class. In this

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<sup>10</sup> Ali Yaşar Sarıbay, *Türkiye'de Modernleşme, Din, ve Parti Politikası: Milli Selâmet Partisi Örnek Olayı*, İstanbul 1985.

environment, a militant, socially radical Islamism had much to offer. Religious responses multiplied to fill the political vacuum, while faith-based welfare substituted for the formal social security system gutted by expenditure cuts. The MSP had been closed down by the military in 1980. When parties were once again allowed to organize in 1983, Erbakan's Welfare Party embodied this transformed Islamism. The Welfare Party was also very vocal on the Kurdish question, promising to recognize the Kurdish language and culture; this won it substantial support not only in the south-east of the country but also among the huge numbers of Kurdish migrants to the central and western cities.

### *First moves in the passive revolution*

The 1980 coup was a turning point in the state's relation to Islam. Crushing the challenge from the left, the ruling bloc also initiated a highly controlled opening to religious groups. Islamic studies were introduced as part of the national school curriculum, while the emphasis on scientific theories such as evolutionism was reduced. Certain hitherto semi-clandestine religious communities were now afforded increased public visibility, under the protection of the state. In the 1982 Constitution drafted for the *junta*, the definition of 'Turkishness' included unprecedented references to Islam.<sup>11</sup> These concessions can be seen as an attempt to contain and defuse the appeal of the Iranian Revolution and of socially radical Islamism through a 'passive revolution' at home, in the classic Gramscian sense—the absorption of (possible or actual) popular demands by counter-revolutionary regimes, as a typical response to revolutions abroad. The other side of this process was the demobilization of potential revolutionary forces. Such 'revolution-restoration', as Gramsci put it in the context of post-1815 European responses to the French Revolution, kept ruling-class regimes intact, while partially satisfying the popular sectors.<sup>12</sup> During the 1980–83 military dictatorship, the Turkish regime likewise took some steps towards implementing Islamist demands, while defusing their insurgent potential. Yet while these changes were intended to consolidate rather than undermine secularization, they nevertheless opened the way to further conflict, as they increased the weight of religious sectors in a nation that defined itself as secular.

<sup>11</sup> Taha Parla, *Türkiye'nin Siyasal Rejimi*, Istanbul 1995.

<sup>12</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, New York 1971, pp. 114–20.

At the same time, the structural reforms initiated under the dictatorship served to increase the income disparities and social dislocation to which radical Islamism appeared an answer. During the 1970s attempts to restructure the crisis-ridden developmentalist model had been stymied by the entrenched clientelistic nature of electoral politics and high levels of labour militancy.<sup>13</sup> The 1980 military coup offered a solution to this impasse, by marginalizing the one and violently repressing the other, thus rendering neo-liberal reform possible. With opposition crushed, strikes outlawed, political parties shut down and activists arrested, wage levels could be cut and fiscal austerity imposed. The reduction of agricultural subsidies intensified the crisis in the villages, accelerating the mass migration to the swiftly de-industrializing cities. Meanwhile the police force was purged of its substantial left-wing elements, and hard-line nationalists and Islamists were recruited in their place.

After 1983, Erbakan's Welfare Party became the beneficiary of these reforms; yet the Islamists themselves were divided and subject to contradictory class pressures.<sup>14</sup> The provincial entrepreneurs who had constituted the driving force of the party in the 1970s were no longer on the defensive. Expanding global markets, cheap labour and flexible production had turned the small and medium-sized export-oriented firms into emerging 'Anatolian tigers'. But the party's base included these same firms' workers. The Welfare Party's 1991 programmatic statement, 'The Just Order', reflected these contradictions. While it emphasized the virtues of private enterprise, appeals to workers' rights and social justice predominated. In a 'just' Islamic economy, workers' representatives would be assigned a crucial role, there would be full employment and wages would be universally set by the state.<sup>15</sup>

But although electorally successful—the Islamist vote rose from 8 per cent in 1987 to 16 per cent in 1991—the programme soon came under attack from the party's business wing. These entrepreneurs would need to differentiate themselves from the radical poor to gain legitimacy

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<sup>13</sup> Joel Beinin, *Workers and Peasants in the Modern Middle East*, Cambridge 2001.

<sup>14</sup> For further details, see Haldun Gulalp, 'Globalization and Political Islam: The Social Bases of Turkey's Welfare Party', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 33, no. 3, August 2001, pp. 433–48.

<sup>15</sup> Necmettin Erbakan, *Adil Ekonomik Duzen*, Ankara 1991, pp. 29, 65–66. For a critical left analysis see Ayşe Buğra, 'Political Islam in Turkey in Historical Context: Strengths and Weaknesses', in Neşecan Balkan and Sungur Savran, eds., *Politics of Permanent Crisis*, New York 2002.

with the ruling power bloc: they increased their pressure on the RP to tone down its social-justice promises, dealt savagely with strikers and declared trade unions un-Islamic. A new layer of middle-class Muslim professionals also voiced its dissatisfaction with the movement's pro-labour orientation, and were more sympathetic to pro-business policies. In 1994 the Welfare Party issued another programme proclaiming that 'The Just Order is the real pro-private sector order'. The tasks of the state were now restricted and there was little criticism of labour exploitation; it was explained that there would be no strikes or lockouts under the Islamist order, since there would be no need for them.<sup>16</sup>

### *A secularist swamp*

Yet while shifting right, the Islamists still appeared a clean alternative to the venality and incompetence of the mainstream parties during the 1990s. Çağlar Keyder has described the Turkish economy's lurch throughout the decade from one financial blow-out to another—in 1994, 1999, 2001—via a trail of bankruptcies, debt, graft, inflation and fiscal crises that required continuous credit infusions by the IMF.<sup>17</sup> Politically, the 1990s saw a series of short-lived coalition governments, with both foreign and interior policies effectively dictated by the military-led National Security Council, established by the 1982 Constitution. The mainstream parties, whether Kemalist or centre-right, proved incapable of either voicing or soothing the grievances caused by neo-liberalization; nor could they provide any coherent ideological identity to replace the (now badly compromised) secular national-developmental model.

Social inequalities were worsened by the successive governments' programmes of fiscal austerity, and by the brutalities and deprivation visited upon the Kurds. Lifted elsewhere in 1983, martial law had only intensified in the Southeast, where the war against the Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK) would eventually claim some 30,000 lives. The UN Security Council's establishment of the no-fly zone in Northern Iraq after 1991 inevitably raised the question of the treatment of Turkey's far larger Kurdish population. Soon after, President Özal entered into secret negotiations with the PKK, offering to relax the ban on the Kurdish language, and in 1993 the PKK announced a ceasefire. But the rapprochement damaged relations between the Motherland Party (ANAP)

<sup>16</sup> Refah Partisi, *Adil Düzen: 21 Soru/21 Cevap*, 1994, pp. 1, 23.

<sup>17</sup> Çağlar Keyder, 'The Turkish Bell-Jar', *NLR* 28, July–August 2004.

and the military. Özal lost control of his party, whose electoral support had declined steadily since 1991. After his death in 1993, ANAP slid back to the conventional position of silence on the Kurds, while maintaining its flagrantly pro-rich policies.

The new coalition government of the Social Democrat Populist Party and the centre-right True Path further deepened the neo-liberalization process with its economic reforms of April 1994. The Social Democrats did nothing to curb the extensive police intelligence, torture and prison system that had expanded after the 1980 coup. They also failed to defend the Kurdish deputies who had run on the Social Democrat ticket in order to get round the 10 per cent barrier (erected by the 1982 Constitution precisely to block the representation of Kurdish and other non-establishment parties). The Kurdish deputies were ousted from the Meclis after speaking out on their ethnic identity in 1994, and several spent the next decade in prison. The Social Democrats' passivity in this drama cost it the Kurdish vote, while its reputation for corruption at the municipal level helped destroy the credibility of the reformist left in Turkey. Yet another reason for the Social Democrats' ultimate marginalization was its shift back to the rigid secularist position of the early Republican People's Party, at a time when Islamic identity was becoming more widely asserted. This also meant that the centre left's base shifted from a working-class/middle-class coalition to one of secular professionals, bureaucratic elite and worker aristocracy. During the 1990s, the growing ranks of informal labour began to desert the centre left, while the centre right lost a part of its traditional small and medium business base. These were the classes that would turn increasingly to the Islamists.

### *Town Hall Islamism*

Despite their internal tensions, the Islamists emerged as the leading party in the 1994 municipal elections, taking over the administration of most key cities. Islamist municipalities channelled more services to poorer districts and distributed free coal, food and clothes. With this came tighter controls on bars and the consumption of alcohol, and a larger place for Islamic and traditional symbols in public.<sup>18</sup> In contrast to the majority of Turkish politicians, united across party lines by their pursuit of the spoils of privatization, the ideological impetus of the

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<sup>18</sup> Alev Inan Çınar, 'Refah Party and the City Administration of Istanbul: Liberal Islam, Localism and Hybridity', *New Perspectives on Turkey*, vol. 16, Spring 1997, pp. 23–40.



Welfare Party had enabled it to stay clean in the post-1980 environment; simply by curtailing municipal corruption, the Islamists achieved a notable improvement in the quality of urban services.

The Welfare Party emerged as the largest force in the general election of 1995 largely on the basis of its achievements in local government. After several months of resistance by the secularist establishment, Erbakan managed to form a coalition government with the True Path. Among its first acts, the Islamist-led coalition implemented the highest wage increases since 1980 and moved to limit profits on interest. In the municipalities, the Welfare Party started to organize well-publicized events to advertise its sympathy for the Palestinian struggle and for Islamic causes. Initially Erbakan signalled an intention of working towards a 'global democracy' based on the cooperation of Muslim nations under Turkish leadership.<sup>19</sup> However he soon caved in to pressure from the Turkish Army, even signing a historic military cooperation agreement with Israel.

Indeed, once in office, the Welfare Party appeared to lose direction. Rather than using governmental power to fight corruption, it covered up for its coalition partner, the True Path—deeply immersed in both political and economic graft—and soon began to show signs of the same disease in its own ranks. The campaigning energies of the religious communities and organizations also now slackened, as most turned their attention to reaping the fruits of office. The Islamists seemed to be integrating themselves into the neoliberal system. Nevertheless, even the now-muted radicalism of the Welfare Party aroused the anger of the traditional ruling bloc. Erbakan talked frequently about the need to open more İmam-Hatip schools, a particular bugbear of secularist military leaders, and hosted a prime-ministerial dinner to which prominent mystic *şeyhs* were invited. Such a gathering was a first in the history of the Republic, and hardliners interpreted it as a formal recognition of religious orders that had been banned since the early Kemalist reforms.

Such were the grounds on which, in February 1997, the military once more intervened in Turkish political life, demanding that the Erbakan government restrict İmam-Hatip schools, increase obligatory secular education from five to eight years, and control religious orders. The

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<sup>19</sup> See Elizabeth Ozdalga, 'Necmettin Erbakan. Democracy for the Sake of Power', in Metin Heper and Sabri Sayarı, eds, *Political Leaders and Democracy in Turkey*, New York 2002.

Welfare Party proved too divided to mount an effective resistance, and the government resigned. The generals proceeded to shut down the party, banned Erbakan from political activity and initiated another round of torture and repression, though not on the scale of the 1980s. At this stage, too, the Army undertook a thorough purging of Islamists from its ranks. Significantly, however, the police forces—notorious for their coercion and brutality—were not reorganized to anything like the same extent.

### *Global currents*

After the crisis of 1997–98, the Islamists initially regrouped as the Virtue Party, which was likewise kept under close scrutiny by the authorities. But they could now hope to gain some external backing from the European Union, which by this stage was funding extensive networks of human-rights and civil-society NGOs in Turkey; the country would be granted candidate status for accession in December 1999.<sup>20</sup> The Islamists toned down their criticism of the establishment, but they also ventured to put up a headscarved woman as a parliamentary candidate. The ban on the headscarf in government buildings was a linchpin of Turkish secularization, and though the Welfare Party had frequently hinted that it should be rescinded, it had never dared to take such a major step while in office. Now its ideologues started to reframe the veil as a matter of human rights, rather than of religious obligation, in the expectation that the EU would intervene on their behalf. In the short term, their tactics backfired. Merve Kavakçı, the headscarved deputy, had to leave the Meclis before she could be sworn in, as the secular-establishment parties forgot their old quarrels to unite in violent condemnation of the ‘intruder’.<sup>21</sup>

But although the period from 1997 until 2001 seemed one of setback for the Islamists, the conditions were building that would bring about the second stage of Turkey’s passive revolution, broadening the role of Islam within the national ideology. Domestically, although subjugated, the Islamists retained widespread support, while the economy plunged deeper into debt as successive secular coalitions accelerated the neoliberal reforms that had been partially interrupted under the short-lived Welfare government. The crash of 2001 saw a devaluation of about 50 per cent, and open disarray among the country’s political leaders.

<sup>20</sup> For more details of EU involvement in Turkey see Keyder, ‘The Turkish Bell-Jar’, p. 78

<sup>21</sup> See Muge Goçek, ‘To veil or not to veil. the contested location of gender in contemporary Turkey’, *Interventions*, vol. 1, no. 4 (1999), pp. 521–35

Internationally, more far-reaching reconfigurations were underway. Islamism in Turkey had arisen in the global context of the 1980s and early 90s, when international forms of Muslim solidarity, in part fostered by militantly Islamist regimes, had raised hopes of constructing an independent Islamic pole on the world stage. By the second half of the 1990s, however, it was becoming clear that the Islamist regimes in Iran and Afghanistan were corrupt, inefficient or coercive, while international Islamic banks and credit institutions were plagued by scandal. Faced with state repression, Islamist resistance movements in Algeria, Egypt and elsewhere alienated their supporters by resorting to indiscriminate violence. 'Actually existing' Islamist radicalism was becoming broadly discredited. This disillusion with religious militancy in the Muslim world was given powerful impetus by Washington's change of line. Having been willing to arm the crudest Islamist groups against Communism during the Cold War, and to back such murderous confessional states as General Zia's Pakistan, the US had started to distinguish between fundamentalist and 'moderate' Islam. The latter referred to religious movements that cooperated with Western hegemony, while oppositional forms were now redefined as terrorists.

In Turkey, the global disillusionment with radical Islamism manifested itself in the turn to the European Union. With no sustained support coming from the Muslim world, religious activists now thought that only the EU, with its discourse of human rights and democracy, could save them from the elitism and repression of the secularist Republic. But following the US, and with an eye to policing their own growing Muslim populations, West European elites were quite happy to turn a blind eye to state authoritarianism as long as it targeted 'fundamentalists'. Thus the Welfare Party's initial approach to Europe bore little fruit. The Islamists would have to demonstrate to the West's satisfaction that they had abandoned all radical claims and become good Muslim 'moderates'.

### *The AKP breakaway*

This changing balance of forces was a crucial determinant in the Islamists' shift towards a thorough-going Americanization. The term is used here to mean not only political support for Washington and the global capitalist order, but a much broader allegiance to American economic, social and religious models. If the first two of these have always been dear to the establishment elite in Turkey, the Islamists'

breakthrough would lie in naturalizing a new version of all three of them among much broader layers.

After the crisis of 1997, when it became clear that larger concessions were necessary to win the toleration of the ruling elite, a new generation of Islamists began to challenge Erbakan's leadership. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, this generational conflict had been expressed as a clash between ardent young radicals and a more conservative mainstream. After 1997, the former radicals were quick to adopt a free-market, 'moderate Muslim' position. Prominent among them were R. Tayyip Erdoğan, Abdullah Gül and Bulent Arınç, all of them differentiated from the old guard by their professionalism, media savvy and attentiveness to the pro-business agenda. Erdoğan, though his family was from the city of Rize in the Black Sea region, was born in Istanbul in 1957 and raised in the run-down neighbourhood of Kasımpaşa, where he attended an İmam-Hatip school. A university graduate and soccer player, he has honed his charisma during years of grass-roots work as an activist and organizer. Gül is from Kayseri, a Central Anatolian city closely integrated with global markets. Born in 1950, he received a PhD from an Istanbul university in 1983, and studied in England. He was an economist at the Islamic Development Bank until 1991, when he became a full-time politician. Arınç, a lawyer, was born in 1948 in Bursa, a conservative city in the industrial Marmara region, and has been politically active since his youth. Arınç still retains links with his old Islamist party, while Gül serves as a bridge between the Islamists and international business, Turkey's ruling elite and the liberal intelligentsia. This new generation of political entrepreneurs was far more receptive to cooperation with the West.

Thus a new alignment emerged from the seeming impasse of 1997. It had become clear that the ideological and class differences among the Islamists were too sharp to be contained within a single party. There were insoluble tensions between the liberalizing business wing and the more conservative and working-class sectors. The authoritarian structure of the party did not allow aspiring young activists to have a say in decision-making. In 2001 the rebels established their own organization, the Justice and Development Party (AKP), having failed to take over the existing structures at a major party congress. Erdoğan and the other AKP leaders moved quickly to reassure the military and media establishments that religion would not be used for political purposes and that the AKP would not challenge the headscarf ban. They were also vociferously

pro-European. They made frequent trips to the United States, holding meetings whose agendas have remained private. Gül helpfully explained to an American audience that the AKP were 'the WASPs of Turkey'. It was clear that the new leadership was trying to reclaim the territory of the centre-right in Turkish politics—in effect, to reconstitute an updated version of that alliance of provincial businessmen, religious intellectuals and state elite at which the subordinate fraction of the ruling power bloc had traditionally aimed, but which had become impossible with the rise of a radical Islamism. Now, this alliance could also offer to strengthen the hand of the neo-liberal and export-oriented sectors of Turkish capital. Large numbers of centre-right politicians, intellectuals and supporters soon swelled its ranks.

Surprisingly, perhaps, the secular centre-right intelligentsia played a forceful role in the constitution of this new alliance. Turkey's major establishment daily *Hürriyet* supported the formation of the AKP as an antidote to the Islamists and the shrinking political centre. Both columnists and editorials like to emphasize the fact that the new party called itself 'conservative democrat' rather than 'Muslim democrat'; the latter option had been discussed around 1999–2000, but dropped after high-level consultations. *Hürriyet*, along with like-minded media, worked systematically to legitimize not only Erdoğan and the AKP but also what came to be their trademark: 'conservative democracy'.

Even more interesting was the support from the liberal and democratic socialist intelligentsia for the AKP. The liberals reasoned that, in contrast to the proximity of the established parties to the state bureaucracy, the AKP stood out as an exception with roots in a civil society movement. Moreover, it had shaken off the authoritarian aspects of that movement, and its understanding of Islam no longer constituted a threat to individual liberties. As a result, the AKP was the only political agent that could integrate Turkey into a liberalizing and democratizing world, and above all lead it into the EU. This view was voiced not only by liberal newspapers such as *Radikal*, but also by social scientists at Turkey's elite universities, where it had become common sense to see the former Islamists as the expression of civil society against the authoritarian state. While the democratic socialists by no means shared in this euphoria, their journals nevertheless presented the AKP as the party most capable of carrying forward democratization and integration to the European Union, and in

any event far preferable to the hard-line nationalism which might prove the only alternative.

Meanwhile, Erdoğan's working-class background, militant roots and plain-talking populist flair retained the support of the many millions who saw in him someone who spoke their language and understood their problems. The AKP also benefited from strong support in the Kurdish regions. In sum, all major classes could see something for themselves in the AKP; this was, in the classical sense, a potentially hegemonic capitalist project. In the general election of November 2002 the AKP won 34 per cent of the vote; the Republican People's Party was the only other electoral force to clear the 10 per cent hurdle, leaving the AKP with 60 per cent of Meclis seats.

### *First tests*

The new AKP government's first test came just three months later, on Iraq. Successive polls had indicated that 90–95 per cent of Turkish citizens were against the American invasion of their next-door neighbour, and opposed still more strongly Turkey's playing any role in such a conflict. Most of the AKP membership had the same positions. However, the leaders of the party and their parliamentary supporters insisted that Turkey needed to go along with American demands, or risk losing its 'most strategic ally'. The Meclis voted on Turkey's involvement in the war on Iraq in three steps. First, in February 2003, a majority of AKP deputies authorized the government to allow the US to 'modernize' its military bases in the country. A second vote, to allow American troops to use Turkish bases for the invasion of Iraq, was to follow in March. Gül, the second man of the party, convinced the Cabinet to vote unanimously in favour. But in the absence of Erdoğan, who would only enter Parliament on March 10th, nearly half the AKP deputies joined the opposition (RPP) to vote down the motion.<sup>22</sup> The third vote was carried out in Erdoğan's authoritarian presence: a crushing majority of AKP deputies now voted in favour of sending troops to Iraq. In the event, the White

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<sup>22</sup> Erdoğan was banned from standing in the 2002 elections under a sentence handed down during the repression of 1998, for having read an (allegedly) Islamist poem to a public meeting. For all the trumpeted European opposition to the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq, this brief flare of resistance in the Meclis made Turkey the only state to have refused a material request. France opened its air space to the USAF-RAF bombers, and Germany put its field hospitals at Bush's disposal.

House blocked Turkey from becoming a part of the occupation force, due to objections from Kurdish members of the interim Iraqi government and, according to some, the Bush Administration's resentment at the March vote.

More lastingly, the votes demonstrated that the AKP could prevail against the will of 90 per cent of Turkish citizens on a matter of international war. The legacy of decades of Islamist activism had been appropriated to support an Anglo-American military invasion in the Muslim world. Most striking of all has been the reception of the AKP's pro-imperialist foreign policy among its working-class base. Here, via such populist Islamist newspapers as *Vakit*, it is repeated even at coffee-shop level that Erdoğan is playing a long, deep game; that these concessions to the Americans may have to be made for now, to strengthen 'our' position, but that the leader knows what he is doing. To maintain this degree of conviction among such numbers, in face of such evidence, is hegemony indeed. One litmus test for the consolidation of a passive revolution is its capacity for demobilization. Since most of the religious population now believed that their party was in power, the Friday prayers—usually occasions of protest during anti-Muslim wars—were largely silent.<sup>23</sup> While there were anti-war protests after 2003, these were mainly supported by the remnants of the left. Among Islamist groups, only Erbakan's Felicity Party, the Islamist rump left after the AKP's split, some human-rights organizations (Mazlum-Der and Özgür-Der), and a few radical grouplets carried out relatively feeble protests. The AKP government had succeeded in pacifying the religious masses, mobilized by the Islamist movement before 2002.

Domestically, the new 'conservative democrats' have worked closely with the IMF to cut public spending—aiming at a 6 per cent surplus, as noted above—and privatize both public enterprises and natural resources. The AKP is undertaking an extensive privatization of public forests—justified by the claim that it will only sell off tracts that have 'lost their qualities' as forests. Real-estate speculators have known how to interpret the message: there were 829 fires in the first seven months of 2003 which scorched 1,755 hectares of forest, qualifying them as fit for privatization. Like other IMF-led governments, the AKP also aims to control wages,

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<sup>23</sup> The 'caricature demonstrations' in February 2006 are an exception to this. However, it is worth noting that these protests had no national political aim, or even a palpable target, unlike the Islamist demonstrations of the 1990s.

curtail unions and limit strikes.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, while real wages keep shrinking, unemployment rising and the numbers living below the poverty line increasing, the Gini coefficient of inequality has decreased slightly, possibly due to an amelioration in the informal labour sector and some means-tested benefits for the poorest layers. This is another reason for the AKP's continuing popularity among these classes.

### *Transformations*

More generally, what differentiates the AKP from Turkey's other neo-liberal parties is its capacity to transform attitudes towards the marketization of the economy at a molecular level. Although previous Islamist programmes had already shifted away from social egalitarianism, this still mattered to the movement's supporters. That resistance to neo-liberalism has now been removed, and there is a broader acceptance of 'market realities' among the popular sectors. One reason for the change is that, for the first time in Turkish history, practising Muslims are spearheading the liberalization of the economy; it is their religious lifestyle that wins them mass consent. The AKP is nevertheless a decidedly secular party, if secularism is understood as the separation of the religious from the political and economic spheres, rather than the purging of religion from public life.<sup>25</sup> While AKP leaders are to be seen attending mosques, they also emphasize that politics and economics have their own self-regulating logics, which should be shielded from religious influence. This stance, too, is grudgingly accepted by the AKP's working-class supporters, who have come to suppose that, if even these pious Muslims have to take such steps when they come to power, then secularism and a pro-Washington foreign policy must somehow be embedded in the logic of the modern state.

Another reason why the AKP could sink roots in the popular classes is its approach to the question of geography. Gramsci once noted that the Italian left, like the bourgeoisie, believed that the South was the reason why Italy was backward: southerners were lazy and criminal by nature.<sup>26</sup> This is more or less how the dominant bloc and the left intelligentsia in

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<sup>24</sup> The AKP government has twice banned a major strike on the grounds that it threatened national security.

<sup>25</sup> For this specific definition, see José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World*, Chicago 1994.

<sup>26</sup> The Socialist Party even circulated 'scientific' texts that proved this inferiority. Gramsci, *Selections from Political Writings, 1921–1926*, New York 1978, pp. 441–62.



Turkey have looked at Central Anatolia, the Black Sea region and (especially) the East. The inhabitants of these parts of the country carry their accents and other markers of regional status like a stigma, one that blocks upward mobility in cosmopolitan venues. The Westernized elite continues to see these regions and their emigrants as uncivilized and backward, the true causes of Turkey's slow and problematic modernization. Many in Europe share this view, and point to these people as the reason why Turkey should not be allowed into the EU. Much of the Turkish left has historically reproduced these stereotypes, explaining away its failures by the ignorance and reaction of the provinces.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the Islamists won these regions not only by glorifying conservative values—in the way the centre-right has always done in Turkey—but by integrating the ex-provincial masses in the expanding urban centres, transforming the cities themselves in the process. The AKP appropriated the strategies of their Islamist forerunners in their approach to the rural immigrants and the provinces. But they also worked more consistently for the integration of Central Anatolian capitalists into world markets, a process under way since the 1980s. Consequently, both groups see the AKP as their natural leaders against Western Turkish elitism, and are therefore more willing to forgive any particular government policy.

### *Eastern advance and retreat*

How has the multi-class coalition mobilized under AKP hegemony stood the test of time? Kurdish support had been an important component of the 2002 majority. The AKP had initially taken a more ambivalent position on the Kurds than its predecessors in the RP. Erdoğan referred vaguely to the equal worth of all God's creatures during the 2002 election campaign, but there was no programmatic commitment to realizing such equality. In office, however, and under pressure to conform to norms of democratization for EU entry, the AKP implemented historic, if still very modest, measures: allowing Kurdish-language TV programmes to be broadcast (within certain time limits), and permitting private Kurdish-language classes, although these were still banned from state schools. In August 2005, Erdoğan declared for the first time that there was a 'Kurdish question', a phrase that is anathema to the national-secular establishment, as it implies a bigger problem than terrorism and poverty. All these steps were warmly welcomed by the liberal and demo-

cratic socialist intelligentsias, which had been quite suspicious about the Welfare Party's positive attitude toward the Kurds. This had been seen as threatening to stir up the disgruntled masses with religion, in contrast to the pro-EU liberalism of the AKP.

By 2006, as we shall see, these issues had been substantially recast by the increasing salience of the Kurdish statelet in northern Iraq and through the slowdown in EU negotiations. But it should also be stated that the Kurdish question cannot simply be reduced to a question of democracy. While EU convergence criteria hold many promises for the Kurds politically, the same cannot be said for their socio-economic situation. The reforms dictated from Brussels are not intended to heal the imbalances that marketization creates, but to produce an environment in which it can proceed more safely. Rural Kurds have been among the hardest hit by the economic reforms, and the fifteen years of military campaigns and guerrilla war did much to destroy their traditional means of livelihood, stock-breeding, forcing them to migrate to eastern or western cities. Diyarbakır, Istanbul, Adana and Mersin are now filled with poor Kurdish families, whose children contribute to a subsistence-level income by begging, polishing shoes or petty crime. These activities exacerbate the tension between the Kurds and the Turks.

There is also a more structural problem: while the state did not spend much on Kurdish regions in its national-developmental phase, there has been even less investment since the liberalization of the 1980s. The transition to a free-market economy was bad news for regions that were already at a disadvantage: capitalists had little incentive for investing, and the risk factor in the Kurdish zone only compounded their reservations. Although other pockets in Anatolia have also suffered, the major geographical losers from economic liberalization have been the Kurdish-populated east and south-east. A flow of EU-backed cultural funding has been largely cosmetic. With the aggravation of their economic conditions, the Kurds are starting to lose their cautious optimism vis-à-vis the AKP.

### *Democratization?*

The appeal of the AKP to liberals and intellectuals in 2002 rested primarily on its pro-democratic, pro-European stance. Yet on democratization, the party has never demonstrated more than a pro forma commitment. Erdoğan is well-known for his authoritarian tendencies, and as the

can-do mayor of Istanbul between 1994 and 1998 he ruled with an iron fist.<sup>27</sup> At its founding congress, the AKP leadership had pledged itself to a regime of internal party democracy, but initial moves in this direction were soon overturned. In 2003, the AKP's Board of Founders annulled internal elections to the Central Committee and invested the party president, Erdoğan, with sole authority to appoint or dismiss members of the Central Committee. These authoritarian moves had their counterparts in the relation of the party to the people. While Erdoğan's government legislated a series of democratic reforms at the instigation of the EU, it has also disregarded the most basic norms of representivity and accountability with regard to its electorate—most blatantly, of course, over Iraq. Rather than taking popular grievances seriously, Erdoğan will publicly scold anybody who talks to him about hunger, unemployment or housing problems. At party rallies he has told the poor to pull themselves together and do something for themselves, instead of expecting the government to do it for them.<sup>28</sup>

A further test of democratization—and another stumbling block for EU entry—is the official approach to the Armenian massacres of 1915. The military elite has always denied any responsibility for these killings, and it is a criminal offence to say they constituted genocide. In 2005, with expectations of democratization rising, an international group of scholars attempted to organize a conference at which the genocide thesis could be openly debated. The AKP Interior Minister Cemil Çiçek reacted by saying that the conference organizers were 'stabbing the nation in the back'. The scholars first called the meeting off, then moved it to a different university. While holding such a gathering would probably have been harder, if not impossible, under any previous government, the incident was a stark reminder of the nationalist-authoritarian tendency within the AKP, of which Çiçek is a leading figure.

As well as democratization, an important question for the AKP's new liberal-democratic supporters is whether the government will make any strong moves towards further Islamization. So far, they have had no real cause for concern. The AKP did try to lift the military's 1997 restrictions on graduates from the İmam-Hatip schools entering secular universities,

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<sup>27</sup> Mehmet Metiner, 'Dünden Bugüne Tayyip Erdoğan', *Radikal İki*, 6 July 2003.

<sup>28</sup> Blaming the poor for their poverty is another dimension of the AKP's Americanization, and its break from both traditional Islam, which sees poverty as fate, and Islamism, which blames the secular-capitalist system for the condition of the poor

channeling them instead into theology faculties. The military had also enforced statutory eight-year attendance at non-religious schools. There had been waves of protest from pious Muslims at the time, but enrollment at İmam-Hatip schools had dropped considerably in the following years. This was a serious blow to the Islamist movement, as most of its activists were the product of these schools. The AKP's draft bill to permit İmam-Hatip students to attend the universities was greeted with outrage by sections of the secularist establishment, who claimed it revealed the party's hidden Islamist agenda. The military insinuated that it was a threat to the secular Republic, and it was vetoed by President Ahmet Necdet Sezer (an appointee of the previous Meclis, in 2000). Establishment journalists and commentators who had supported the AKP in 2002 announced that this was crossing the line, although few actually broke with the government.

Such reactions were, to say the least, exaggerated. The AKP had no agenda of Islamicizing the whole education system. It was only striving to retain what was an important resource for any religiously oriented project—as the Catholic Church, for example, has long understood. The main point is that the AKP's brand of Americanism does not negate all things Muslim; schools with religious curricula flourish within the American system. At stake, rather, are negotiations over the new boundaries for religion in the Turkish public sphere. Other changes, such as the down-playing of evolutionary theory in textbooks and the increasing number of religious programmes on TV, are similar symptoms of the ways in which these boundaries are becoming defined by a framework closer to American conservatism than to Islamist demands.

Most crucially, the Erdoğan government has given the clearest signals that Islamism will play no part in its foreign policy. It has aimed to play a leading role in the Bush Administration's self-styled Greater Middle East Initiative. AKP leaders and their media relays have marketed this project to their religious base as an opportunity for Turkey to have a greater say in the region; one that combines closer relations with Islamic countries with the chance to reap broader economic and political benefits from the assertion of US control. The AKP launches 'Islamic' foreign-policy salvos, but an attentive reading reveals that these are usually voicing Washington's demands in Muslim phraseology. The AKP's approach to HAMAS, after its victory in the 2005 Palestinian Authority elections, was designed to convey the West's message—'Disarm!'—rather than

to signal militant Islamist solidarity. When HAMAS representatives visited Ankara, the US ambassador promptly issued a statement of support for AKP policies in Iraq, which appeased establishment worries about American reactions to the Palestinians' visit. Gül has become a traveling emissary in the region, going to Tehran in June 2006 to deliver the West's latest demands on the nuclear issue. The visit pleased both the Islamic states, who were happy to see Turkey overcome its secularist prejudices and value its neighbours, and the Western powers, who could get their messages conveyed to the mullahs by their co-religionists rather than their 'enemies'. Similarly, Gül has pressed Damascus to exert a moderating influence on Hezbollah in Lebanon. One result of this foreign policy has been greatly improved relations between the party and the more liberal wing of the military under Hilmi Özkök, Chief of Staff until 2006.

### *Challenges*

Yet for all its successes in retaining the support of the 2002 coalition, the AKP faces a number of difficulties ahead which, if severe enough, might pose challenges to its hegemony over certain sectors. Among the most dangerous is the economy. During its first three years in office the Erdoğan government benefited from the post-2001 recovery, following the dramatic devaluation of that year. Growth, built on heavy borrowing, sustained consent for the economic reforms even among those worst hit by fiscal austerity. But the Turkish economy is highly exposed. A widening current-account deficit requires constant capital inflows, and the privatization programme that the AKP is undertaking to attract these is bedevilled by legal problems, graft and the run-down state of public utilities and infrastructure. As Turkey has opened to global markets, the traditionally strong textile and clothing industries, the basis for Central Anatolian growth in the 1980s, have lost out to countries with cheap labour, primarily China. Turkish capital investment is now mainly directed towards finance, tourism, and construction—all highly dependent on the vicissitudes of the global economy. A shake-out of world stock markets would have a very serious effect.

In May–June 2006, Turkey experienced its first serious financial shock under the AKP. There was a sudden outflow of short-term capital after the US Federal Reserve raised interest rates. The lira plummeted, and inflation rose sharply with more expensive imports. Weak sectors of

the economy—textiles, clothing, agriculture—were hard hit, as interest rates, rents and food prices continued to climb after the financial crisis subsided, and the lira continued to tremble with every mild fluctuation on the global scene. In July 2006 the AKP faced the first mass protest over its economic policies: 80,000 hazelnut producers in the Black Sea region blocked the Samsun highway to protest the government cuts in agricultural subsidies that had left the growers' co-operative unable to purchase their crop. They targeted Erdoğan's close advisor Cunejd Zapsu, chairman of the exporters' association that stands to gain most from low prices. In all probability, these workers had been AKP voters. In late August, public officials' unions threatened major strikes to counter falling real wages. With economic tensions growing, opinion polls suggest that the right-wing Nationalist Action Party has been regaining ground. In the last year, nationalist gangs have attempted more than a dozen lynchings of Kurdish immigrants living in western Turkish cities, and stoned AKP members after a nationalist rally. One result is that it is becoming harder to sell Turkey as an 'emerging market' success story to foreign investors.

A second problem that the AKP confronts is the faltering accession talks with the EU. The Republic of Cyprus's overwhelming rejection of the Annan Plan in its April 2004 referendum scotched the West's 'solution' for the island, and confronted Turkey with the necessity of recognizing the ROC, initially in the form of extending its 1995 Customs Union agreement with the EU to include the latest members, Cyprus among them. In July 2005 Erdoğan signed the protocols, while announcing loudly that this did not amount to a recognition of the Cypriot government. By the EU deadline of December 2006, Turkey had not opened its ports and harbours to Cyprus. Accession talks were partially suspended, and Brussels extended its inspections of Turkey's 'progress' over a still longer time-span. It also complained of Ankara's foot-dragging over the requested amendments to the Turkish penal code's Article 301, which criminalizes critics of the state. It is no longer so easy for the AKP to offer accession to the EU as a highway to a better future.

### *Opponents*

Amid these uncertainties, the AKP still possesses the advantage that all political alternatives to its rule are totally discredited. Yet it has opponents, whose hands may be strengthened if the AKP government loses

its lustre in worsening economic times. The most significant of these include hard-line factions within the state, the growing nationalist backlash and radical Islamism. Among official circles, including the nationalist wings of the judiciary and the military, there are still many who watch the AKP with suspicion and would like to see it toppled. Deniz Baykal, the leader of the Republican People's Party and the political representative of these circles, has frequently implied the need for military and street action against the AKP. Elements of the deep state have given this more concrete form.

In 2005, several people were killed in a series of bomb blasts in the Kurdish town of Şemdinli in Hakkari, one of the poorest places in Turkey. Official sources attributed the explosions to the PKK and the increasing tension in the southeast since the end of the ceasefire in 2004. But in November 2005 one of the bombers was caught red-handed. Passers-by had seen him leave a case in front of a bookstore. He then waited around to watch the ensuing explosion, in which a man was killed. The angry onlookers surrounded the bomber, who panicked and shouted, 'Stop, I'm a police officer!' He was only saved from lynching by the security forces. The suspicion that clandestine elements of the state were behind the other Şemdinli bombings—a suspicion voiced even by the establishment press—was virtually confirmed when the Army's Second-in-Command, Yaşar Büyükanıt, coolly remarked of the bomber: 'I know him; he is a good boy.'

In response to this, and in line with Erdoğan's promise that all responsible parties would be punished, a local public prosecutor in Van began an investigation which implicated Büyükanıt in organizing paramilitary activities in the southeast. The prosecutor came under attack from the establishment media, which claimed—without evidence—that he had connections with a clandestine religious community, and that the accusations against Büyükanıt were a part of a conspiracy to denigrate the military because of its struggle against 'fundamentalism'. The insinuation was that the AKP was behind this scheme. The prosecutor was disbarred for preparing a 'faulty indictment', and soon anybody attempting to investigate the Şemdinli affair became suspect. Ultimately, two low-ranking officers were sentenced, and further legal proceedings were deemed futile. The AKP, which had initially backed the prosecutor, fell silent—another disappointment for its liberal supporters. In August



2006, after months of speculation as to who would be Özkök's successor as Chief of Staff, the AKP appointed Büyükanıt to the post.

Further evidence emerged of a deep-state campaign against the AKP's Islamist supporters following the assassination of the head of the Danıştay, a high administrative court, in May 2006. Some months before the Danıştay had blocked the promotion of a nursery schoolteacher on the grounds that, though of course unveiled during working hours, she covered her head for the journey home. This was seen as an extreme reactionary measure even by the establishment media, and provoked an indignant response from the popular Islamist press, with *Vakit* publishing photographs of the Danıştay decision-makers on its front page. The assassination of the Danıştay's top judge, apparently by a young Islamist lawyer, ignited a storm of secular outrage, and there were large demonstrations, led by top members of the judiciary, protesting against the Islamists and the AKP. A few days later, however, the conservative and pro-AKP daily *Zaman* revealed connections between the assassin and a group of retired army officers, who were members of an emerging network of paramilitary, hard-line nationalist organizations. These officers also apparently had links with the state: police had found secret official files in their homes. Their plan was to discredit and perhaps bring down the AKP government.

Initially demoralized, the establishment press soon hit back by denouncing all this as an Islamist confection: the 'secret files' had been manufactured by conservative religious elements in the police, and handed to *Zaman*. Put together with the attempts by the 'religious' prosecutor to implicate Büyükanıt in the Şemdinli bombings, this new conspiracy demonstrated rather that the tentacles of Islamism ran deep into the farthest reaches of the state. Neither the secularists nor the Islamists could provide conclusive evidence for their claims. But the drama revealed the depth of the hitherto covert conflict between the military and the police. The concentration of hard-line secular nationalists in the Army, and of religious conservatives in the ranks of the police, threatens low-level conspiratorial wars within the security forces as well as against the civilian population. Amnesty International has reported a decrease in state torture under the AKP; but the Şemdinli and Danıştay affairs raise the question of whether the forces of coercion have not resorted to more intricate methods of control and intimidation than 'simple' torture and repression.



With the assassination of Hrant Dink these issues were sharply posed again. The editor of the bilingual Turkish-Armenian newspaper *Agos*, Dink was a conciliatory figure who emphasized democratization and Turkish-Armenian dialogue rather than focusing on the genocide debate. Despite this caution, he was charged several times with 'denigrating Turkishness'; one of around fifty intellectuals to be indicted under Article 301 in Erdoğan's Turkey. Unlike most of the others, Dink was convicted in 2005 and given a suspended sentence. He had also been frequently threatened by nationalist paramilitary organizations. On 19 January 2007 Dink was shot in the head outside his newspaper office by an unemployed youth from Trabzon. The killer was arrested, but within a few days investigators revealed that not only had a police informant been involved in organizing the crime, but that high-level members of the police apparatus had known about the planned assassination beforehand. No sooner were these details disclosed than the investigation came to an abrupt halt. Emboldened by the popular anger at Dink's killing—100,000 had marched in his funeral procession—several civil and political organizations began to campaign for the forces behind the murder to be fully unmasked. Yet, as of early March 2007, things remained at a standstill. In the already strained atmosphere before the April presidential elections, Dink's assassination has heightened tensions and demonstrated the AKP's powerlessness to act against this continuing campaign of coercion and terror.

### *Islamist quiescence?*

A second locus of potential opposition to the Erdoğan government is radical Islamism—voiced by those left behind by the AKP's Americanization. Local AKP activists have tried to reassure their more militant Islamist brethren by circulating 'hidden transcripts' arguing that they still believe in the same principles, but longer-term methods are now required. Some AKP leaders—such as Bülent Arınç, who led the Meclis vote against the Iraq war in March 2003—remain in touch with the traditional Islamist Felicity Party. Others demonstrate their commitment by praying in public places. On the whole, as noted above, radical Islamists have been loath to criticize the government. There were large-scale protests against the Danish caricatures of the Prophet—especially in the east and south-east, hinting at a radical Islamic reorganization in the region—but these were a safely non-political distraction.

A major test for the Islamists was the dispatch of Turkish troops to join the UN force in Lebanon in October 2006. As with Iraq, a majority of the population was strongly opposed to the Israeli invasion and the IDF destruction of south Beirut. The terms of deployment of the UN force under Resolution 1701—to help disarm the region ‘south of the Litani River’—seemed clearly intended to finish the job of downgrading Hezbollah that Israel had failed to do. Characteristically, the AKP attempted both to act with its main military partners, the US and Israel, and to convince its base that it was on the side of the ‘oppressed’. In July 2006, Erdoğan’s condemnation of Israeli ‘excesses’ at the Organization of the Islamic Conference in Kuala Lumpur was warmly received in the Muslim world, although it differed little from the G8 Summit’s formula of ‘disproportionate response’.

Following the passage of Resolution 1701, both Erdoğan and Gül urged the need for Turkish troops to ‘come to the aid’ of the suffering Lebanese people. AKP leaders have invoked the Ottoman Empire traditions of ‘the nation’s ancestors’: Turkey must not remain aloof from the problems of its neighbours and ignore the Middle East, as it had done for the past eighty years. Or, repeated in the language of Americanization: Turkey had to intervene in the region to become a global player. There was also a war of disinformation: Islamist media in favour of sending troops reported that Hezbollah had actually invited Turkey to Lebanon. This seems highly unlikely, given the formal military agreement between Israel and Turkey signed by Erbakan in 1996. Although the scale of this military partnership is secret, it is known to involve joint training exercises, shared intelligence, assistance in counter-insurgency operations and modernization of equipment—that is, Turkish purchases from Israeli arms manufacturers. The AKP, of course, has taken no steps to annul it.

Yet Islamist protests against the dispatch of Turkish troops to Lebanon were muted, if somewhat bigger in the east of the country. Ironically, it was the more concerted opposition to the deployment from the Republican People’s Party and the nationalist right that helped to rally AKP deputies’ support. At the end of August 2006, the rigidly secularist President Sezer—anathema to the religious conservatives—declared that, rather than send troops to Lebanon, Turkey should be dealing with its domestic problems, implying the resurgent PKK in the south-east. This was sufficient to convince the AKP parliamentarians that the enemies of ‘conservative democracy’ were united in trying to prevent

the government from sending troops. The Cabinet convened immediately after the President's statement and agreed to the deployment; a decision ratified by 340 to 192 in an emergency session of the Meclis on September 5th, despite opinion polls which showed that some 80 per cent of the public was against the measure. The decision was also welcomed, of course, by the EU, the Western media and pro-Western liberals in Turkey; some European commentators even saw it as a good reason to speed up EU accession talks.

### *A hardening stand*

A third potential basis of opposition to the AKP lies in the rising nationalist sentiment in Turkey, which has been demanding a tougher position against the Kurdish rebels, more controls on markets and more cautious relations with the West. Support for the EU has decreased markedly over the past year. The emergence of a potential Kurdish statelet in northern Iraq has alarmed Turkish nationalists who think that this might be a first step towards a greater Kurdistan, which would inevitably lead to the dismemberment of the country. This has led to the establishment of several racist and ethnic segregationist groups in the last years. These groups, some of them armed and led by retired officers, are becoming popular especially in western regions with large Kurdish migrant populations. Equally, the potential Kurdish statelet has emboldened Kurdish nationalists. In 2004 the PKK ended the ceasefire it had maintained since the arrest of its leader Abdullâh Öcalan in 1999, citing the AKP government's refusal to grant a total amnesty. But by taking up arms, the guerrilla have inevitably provoked both a security clampdown and a nationalist backlash. The PKK declared another cease-fire at the end of September 2006, which again fell on deaf ears.

Whereas two years ago the Erdoğan government—admittedly, at EU urging—emphasized the need to acknowledge Kurdish identity, it is now obsessed with arresting the leaders of the PKK. In terms all too familiar from the 1990s, it has dismissed a mass demonstration in the east as 'terrorism', and brushed off criticisms of the security forces for having killed ten civilians. In June 2006, the AKP introduced amendments to the anti-terror legislation that seriously curtailed existing civil rights. Suspects under arrest will no longer have access to lawyers for the first 24 hours of their detention, increasing the likelihood of torture. It is now a criminal act to publish statements by illegal organizations, or even to sympathize

with their views. This could hurt the Islamists and sections of the left, but will most probably be used against supporters of Kurdish organizations. The AKP seems likely to ride the nationalist tide by shifting in a more authoritarian direction, especially where the Kurds are concerned.

At the same time—such are the contradictions of client-state nationalism—many establishment figures have argued that Turkey has to make itself ever-more indispensable to the Americans in order to persuade Washington to set limits on the emergence of any form of Kurdistan. This was one of the arguments used by secular-nationalist journalists, policy advisors and intellectuals in favour of joining the UN occupation force in Lebanon—that this was the only way to get the US to crack down on the PKK bases in northern Iraq. Given their current plight in Iraq the Americans are in no position to antagonize the Kurds, but they have appointed a retired American general as a facilitator to soothe Turkish fears and negotiate between Ankara and the Kurds. Ironically, the logic of a growing Turkish nationalism thus leads to intensifying Americanization, even as it demonstrates the AKP's incapacity to implement this latest twist on its own.

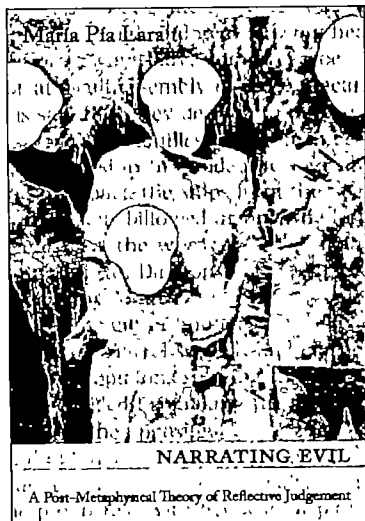
Internally, then, the Turkish ruling bloc has reasserted its hegemony through the passive revolution of the past decades: integrating and demobilizing the provincial bourgeoisie and religious communities, while maintaining its control. The new-formed AKP, less than two years old when it won its first overall majority, has been the main agent of this 'revolution-restoration'. Its leaders had absorbed aspects of the radical Islamist revolt of the 1980s, to which they added big business, the Pentagon and a keen understanding of New World religiosity. Is the model exportable? In 2006, Hamas announced that it would take the AKP as its exemplar when it moved into the offices of the Palestinian Authority.<sup>29</sup> But the AKP's current hegemony, as we have seen, rests on a very specific conjuncture of mobile class forces, state structures and cultural traditions. However eager other Muslim leaders in the Middle East may be to follow Erdoğan's example, it remains to be seen whether Turkey's brand of Islamized Americanization can be easily reduplicated elsewhere.

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<sup>29</sup> 'Ankara Warns Hamas Renounce Violence and Negotiate', *Zaman*, 17 February 2006; 'Hukümet Kurarken AKP'yi Örnek Aldık', *Tempo*, 23 March 2006.

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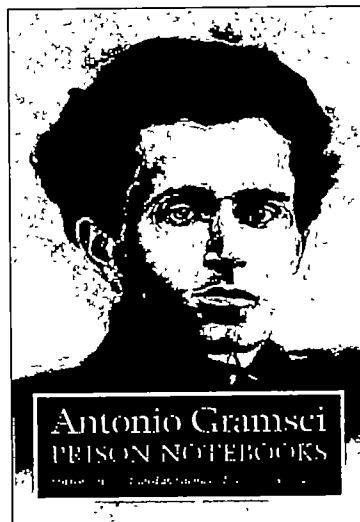
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## VLADIMIR POPOV

*One of Russia's most original comparative economists, Vladimir Popov was born in Moscow in 1954, and graduated from Moscow State University in 1976. Initially specializing on the economies of the US and Canada, he turned his attention to the USSR during the perestroika period, and co-authored, with Nikolai Shmelev, a series of texts on the reforms initiated by Gorbachev; these appeared as The Turning Point in 1989. From Plan to Market: The Soviet Economy in Transition followed in 1991. Strikingly, Popov predicted an imminent, deep recession, estimating that the contraction would be of the order of the American Great Depression. While many free-market apologists, awaiting an instant capitalist miracle, dismissed Popov's warning as overly pessimistic, it in fact proved insufficiently so: instead of shrinking by a third, GDP dropped by over 50 per cent, and the slump lasted for nearly a decade.*

*Over the course of the 1990s Popov taught and researched in a number of countries—Germany, Finland, Italy, Japan, Sweden, the US and Canada—before directing his gaze eastwards, to co-author, with Manuel Montes, The Asian Crisis Turns Global in 1999. Popov's sober analysis, solid empirical data and strongly comparative approach were on display again in his landmark 2000 essay, 'Shock Therapy vs Gradualism: The End of the Debate'. Here, the outcomes of marketization reform in the ex-Soviet Union, Central and Eastern Europe were assessed alongside those undertaken in China and Vietnam. Neither the speed nor extent of liberalization explained the variations in these countries' subsequent fortunes, according to Popov; rather, these derived from existing conditions, levels of development and strength of institutions.*

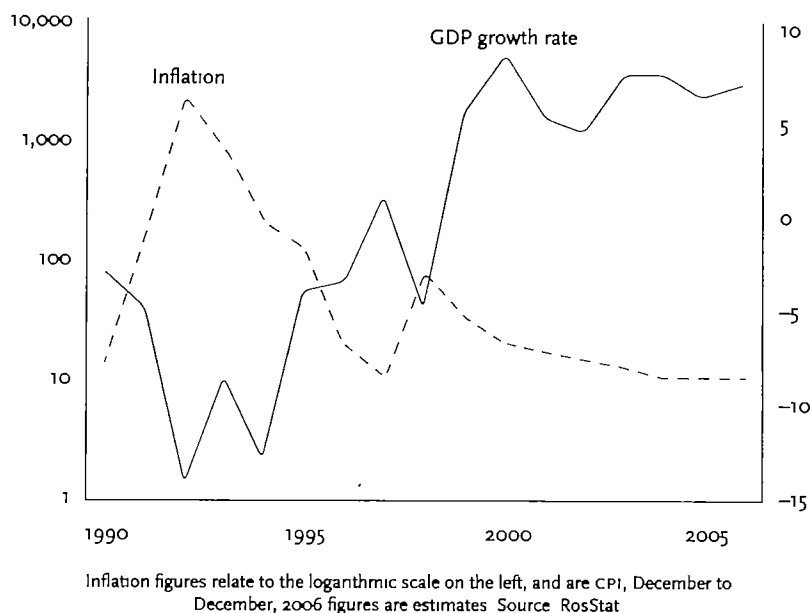
*Popov's Three Drops of Water (2002) sought to counter a deep-seated sinophobia in Russian culture and policy-making by placing the PRC's record in historical perspective. In a recent paper, Popov has argued that Chinese growth rests on the 'achievements of the Mao period', as well as on an institutional continuity of millennial depth. Noting that China's developmental surge is the first to be based on an indigenous rather than Western economic model, he draws a characteristically thought-provoking conclusion: 'If this interpretation is correct, the next large regions of successful catch-up development would be ME-NA Islamic countries and South Asia, whereas Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa and Russia would fall behind'.*

## RUSSIA REDUX?

**B**Y THE SPRING of 2008, Russia will have a new president and parliament. Though Putin's popularity ratings are extremely high—if elections were held tomorrow, opinion polls suggest he would win in the first round with over 50 per cent of the vote—the constitution bars him from seeking a third term. There has been much discussion in the press of candidates to succeed him—Dmitry Medvedev, First Deputy Prime Minister, is mentioned most frequently—but there can be little doubt that Putin himself will nominate his successor. It is even possible that Putin will remain as leader of the dominant party, head of government, or both. The transfer of power is therefore likely to be smooth, ensuring the continuity of the present regime. However, an examination of Russia's recent social and economic fortunes reveals a number of problems that Putin's successor will inherit, presenting him with a difficult agenda.

After losing 45 per cent of its output in 1989–98, the Russian economy started to expand as of 1999: GDP grew by 6 per cent that year, 10 per cent in 2000, and 4–7 per cent in 2001–06. The major impetus for this came from the devaluation of the rouble in 1998 and, later, from higher world prices for oil and gas (Figure 1, overleaf); but Putin can at least take credit for not ruining this growth. Inflation fell from 84 per cent in 1998, when prices jumped after the August 1998 currency crisis and rouble devaluation, to 10–12 per cent in 2004–06.

In comparative perspective, however, Russia's performance is not that impressive. Many other former Soviet republics—Azerbaijan, Belarus, Estonia, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and, according to some calculations, Armenia—reached or exceeded their pre-recession (1989) levels of output by 2006, whereas Russian GDP was still only at 85 per cent of the 1989 level (Figure 2, overleaf). Russia's Human

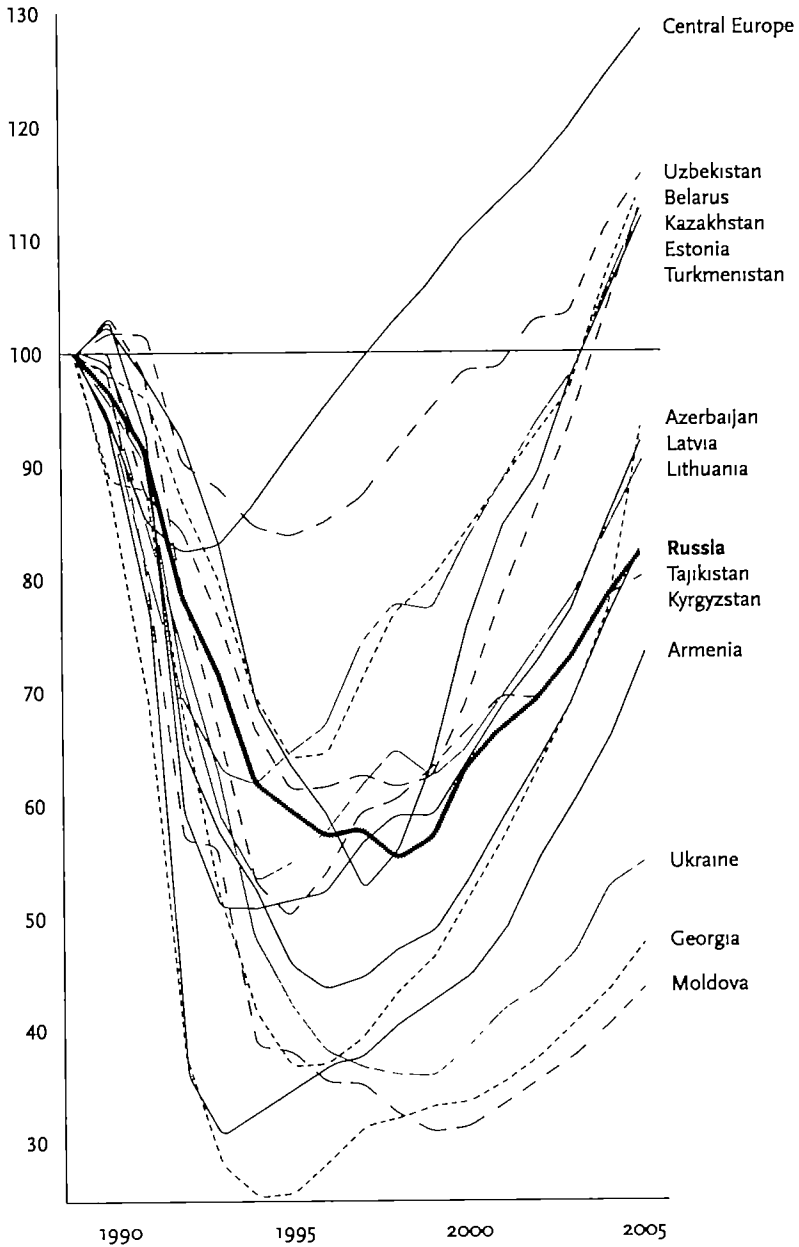
FIGURE 1: *Russian GDP growth rate and inflation, 1990–2005 (percentages)*

Development Index (taking account not only of GDP per capita, but also life expectancy and levels of education) is still inferior to that of the USSR and even below that of Cuba, where life expectancy is 77 years, against 65 in Russia. China, with a life expectancy of 72, is rapidly approaching Russia's HDI ranking (Figure 3, overleaf).

But at least there is more stability in Russia today than during the rocky 1990s. The government budget balance moved from deficit to surplus, the decline in the share of state revenues and expenditure was halted (Figure 4, overleaf), government debt—domestic and external—decreased (Figure 5, overleaf), and foreign exchange reserves increased to over \$250 billion by the end of 2006 (Figure 6, overleaf). In 2004 the government created a Stabilization Fund to hold the windfall profits from fuel exports; by the summer of 2006 the Fund contained over \$80 billion. Several analysts, however, have pointed out that, given the increase in world fuel prices in recent years, one could have expected an acceleration of economic growth, rather than the slowdown that actually occurred in 2001–06 as compared to 2000.

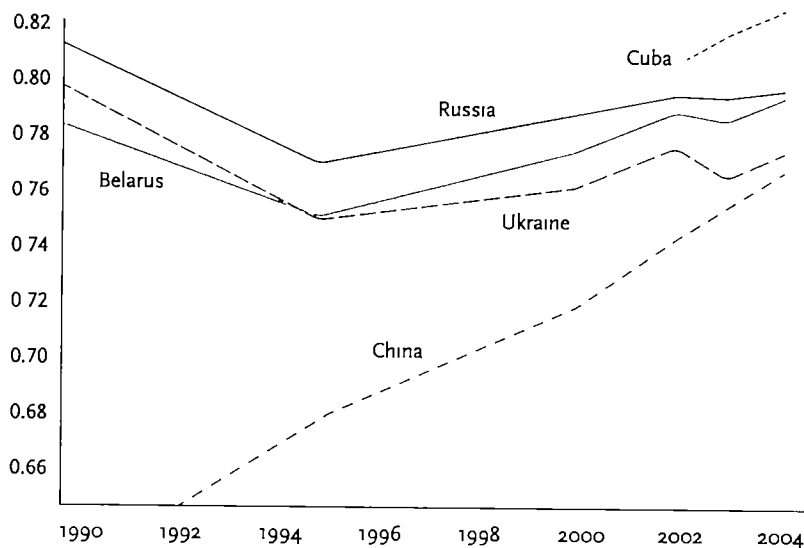


FIGURE 2: *Change in GDP of former Soviet Union economies*



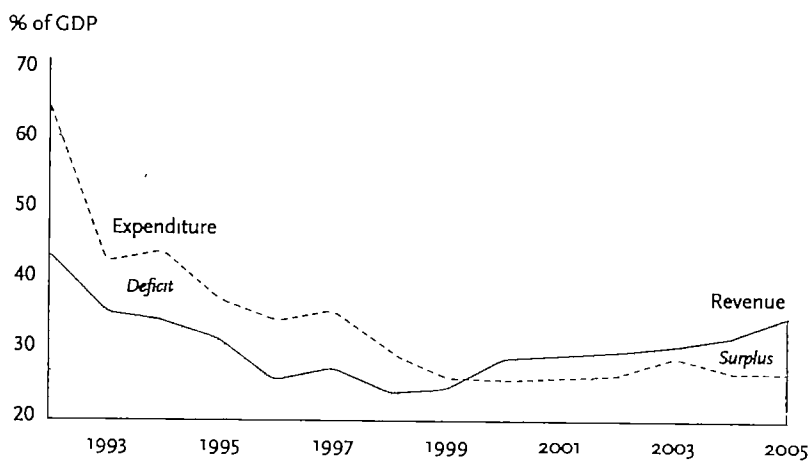
1989 = 100 per cent Source: EBRD, *Transition Report*, various years

FIGURE 3: UN Human Development Index, 1990–2002

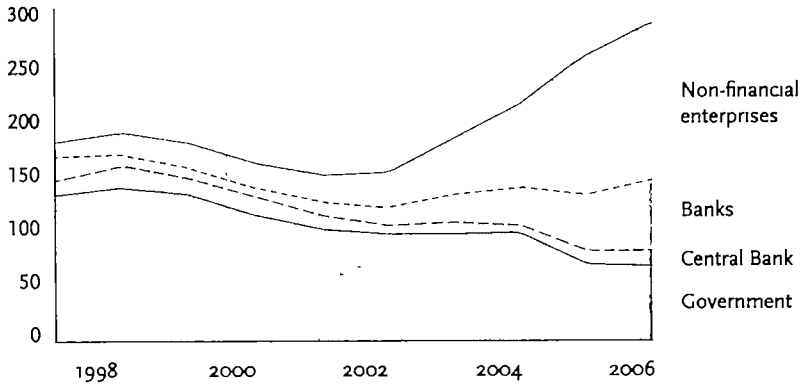


Source: UNDP, Human Development Report 2006

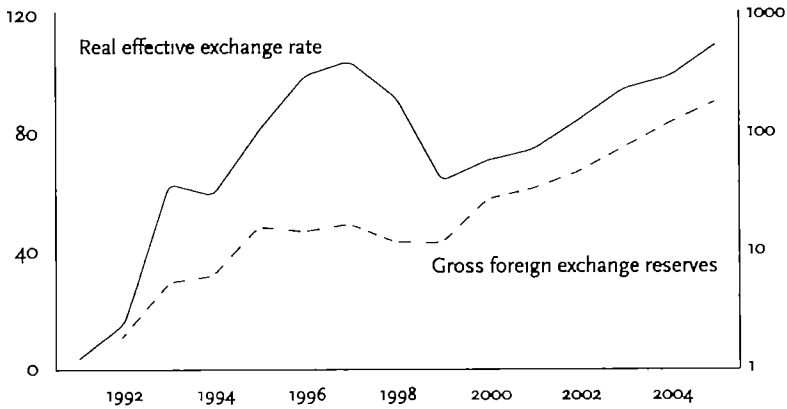
FIGURE 4: Russian government revenues and expenditure



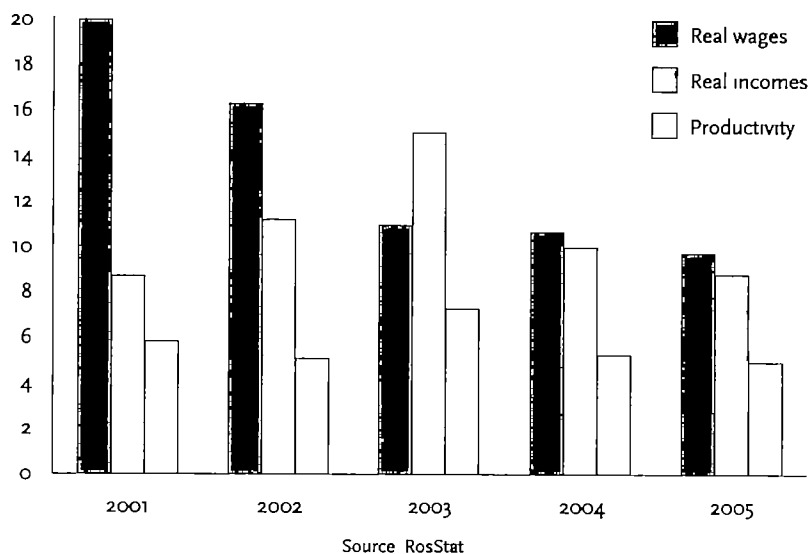
Source: RosStat and Russian Ministry of Finance

FIGURE 5: *Russia's external debt (in \$ billion)*

Central Bank debt includes government debt to IMF (2006 figures estimates)  
Source Russian Central Bank

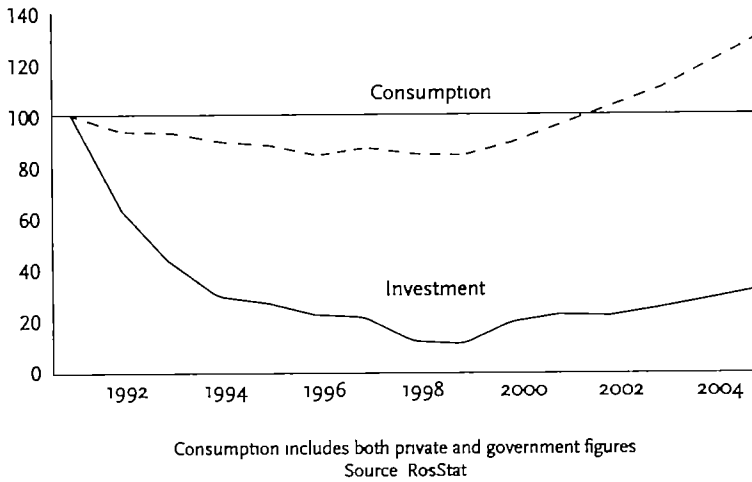
FIGURE 6: *Real effective exchange rate and gross foreign exchange reserves*

Real effective exchange rate refers to left scale. Dec 1995 = 100, gross foreign exchange reserves refer to logarithmic scale on right, figures in \$ billion, including gold reserves  
Source Russian Central Bank

FIGURE 7: *Annual growth rates of wages, incomes and productivity (per cent)*

The reason for the 2001–06 deceleration in growth was the overvaluation of the real exchange rate (Figure 6, previous page)—the typical Dutch disease that Russia has developed once again. It first arose in 1995–98, leading to the currency crisis of August 1998, and it now seems that history is repeating itself. Optimists argue that, unlike in 1998, Russia currently has large foreign exchange reserves (over \$250 billion), but pessimists point out that if oil prices drop and capital starts to flee at a rate of \$5 billion a week, as it did in July–August 1998, these reserves would be depleted very quickly. A future devaluation could take the form of either a currency crisis or a ‘soft landing’, but there is little doubt that it will eventually take place.

Besides, current growth is not based on solid foundations: wages and incomes in recent years have been growing systematically faster than productivity (Figure 7), so that the share of consumption in GDP has increased at the expense of investment. As a result, whereas Russian personal and public consumption has already exceeded the pre-recession level, investment is still below 40 per cent of what it was in the last year of existence of the USSR (Figure 8, opposite). Russian gross savings are large—over

FIGURE 8: *Growth of real investment and total consumption, 1991–2005*

30 per cent of GDP—but they have been funnelled away via the outflow of private capital and the accumulation of foreign exchange reserves; gross investment therefore amounts to less than 20 per cent of GDP.

There is also another important deficiency in the current growth: the government has failed to use windfall revenues from oil and gas exports in 2000–06 to repair badly damaged state institutions and to restore the provision of crucial public goods, such as law and order, education and health care. Instead, the government cut tax rates, allowing profits from natural resources to accumulate as personal and business income, and has amassed a budget surplus. The share of state spending in GDP has barely increased at all, remaining at the extremely low level of 1999—less than half that of the USSR (see Figure 4, above).

### *Social trends*

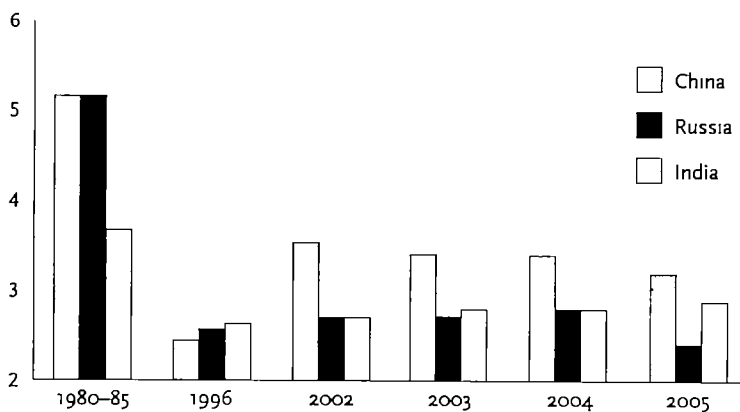
The inevitable economic instability of the coming years will have an important effect on future political and social developments, but perhaps less so than the dynamics of the state's institutional capacities. A strong, efficient state is one that has the power to enforce its rules and regulations, no matter what these are. Crime and murder rates and the

size of the shadow economy are natural measures of the strength of state institutions. Strong states may be more or less democratic: both China and Central European countries, with murder rates of about 2 per 100,000 inhabitants, have a stronger state than Russia, with about 25–30 murders per 100,000.

The notion of the state implies that public authorities exercise at least three monopolies: on violence, on tax collection, and on the issuing of money (coinage). All three monopolies were undermined in Russia during the 1990s to such an extent that the very existence of the state was put into question. Government failure became pervasive and much more visible than market failure. In 1998, just before the currency crisis, the payment system was on the brink of collapse: barter deals exceeded 50 per cent of total transactions and enterprises were accumulating non-payments (trade, tax and wage arrears), delaying sums owed to the government, their partners and their workers. After economic growth resumed in October 1998, non-payments and barter transactions quickly disappeared, but there is no guarantee they will not rise again, if the authorities resort to tight monetary policy.

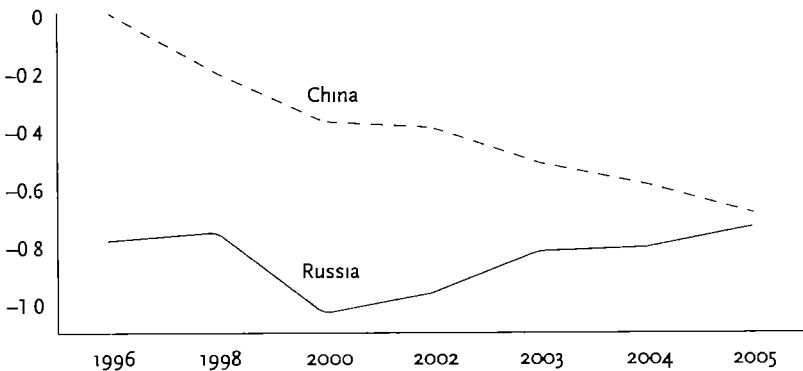
Tax collection, after falling dramatically in 1992–98, increased slightly (see Figure 4, above), but mostly due to the resumption of growth, rather than better tax compliance. Government efficiency has not

FIGURE 9: *Corruption perception indices, 1980–2005*



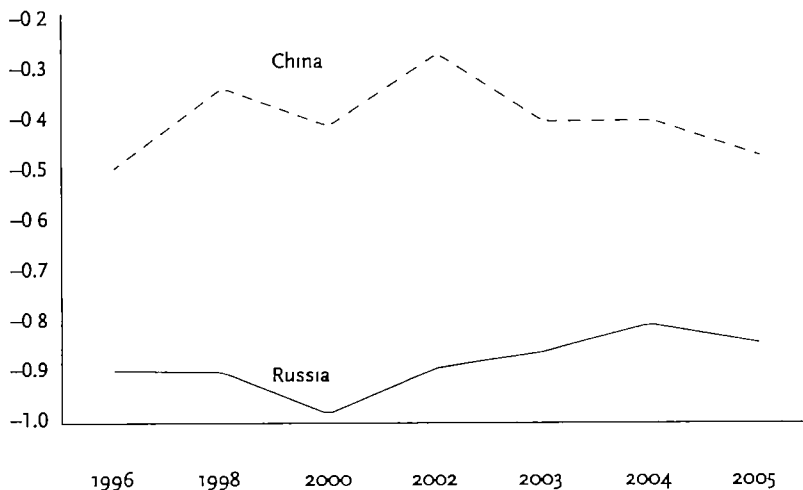
Source: Transparency International

FIGURE 10: *World Bank control over corruption indices*

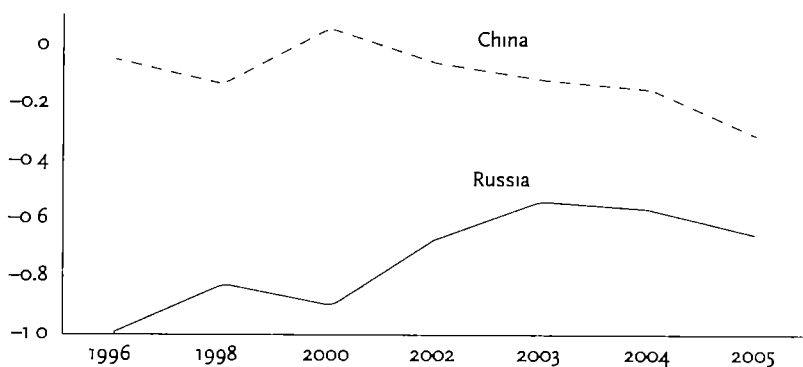


Source: World Bank Governance Indicators dataset, 2007

FIGURE 11: *World Bank rule of law indices*



Source: World Bank Governance Indicators dataset, 2007

FIGURE 12: *World Bank government effectiveness indices*

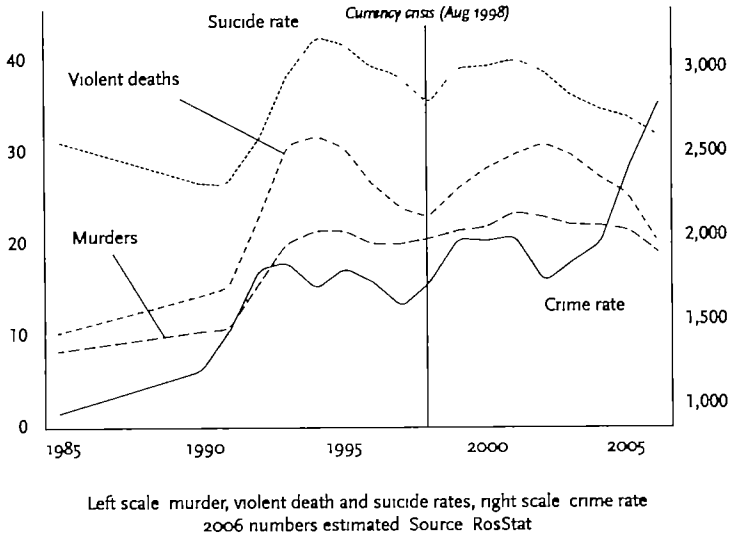
Source: World Bank Governance Indicators dataset, 2007

improved in recent years: different measures of corruption, government effectiveness and rule of law, though inevitably subjective in nature, concur in registering a lack of significant progress (Figures 9–12). Low spending levels, moreover, mean that the state simply cannot provide enough public goods.

But worst of all, the scale and scope of criminality in Russian society remains vast. The crime rate rose gradually in the Soviet Union as of the mid 1960s, but after the collapse of the USSR there was an unprecedented surge—in just a few years crime and murder rates doubled, equalling or surpassing the highest levels in the world (Figure 13, opposite).<sup>1</sup> By the mid 1990s the murder rate stood at over 30 per 100,000 inhabitants, as against 1–2 in Western and Eastern Europe, Canada,

<sup>1</sup> Crime statistics are usually perceived to be incomparable for different countries because of large variations in the percentage of registered crimes. But murders are registered quite accurately by both criminal and death (demographic) statistics. The former are more restrictive than the latter, since they register only illegal murders, whereas demographic figures cover all murders, including ‘legal’ ones—capital punishment and ‘collateral damage’ during wars, anti-terrorist and other police operations. Both rates skyrocketed in Russia at the beginning of the 1990s and remain at extremely high levels. The gap between these two indicators widened during the first and second Chechen wars (1994–96 and 1999–2002), see Figure 13.

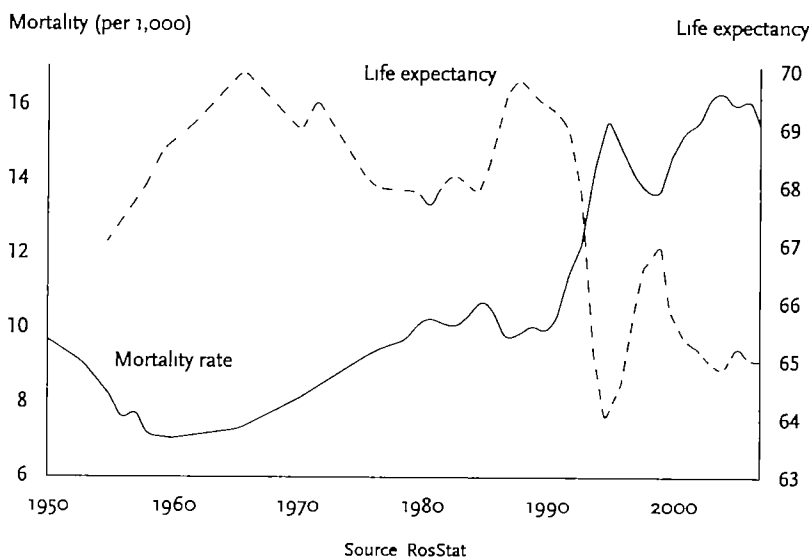


FIGURE 13: *Murder, violent death, suicide and crime rates, per 100,000*

China, Japan, Mauritius and Israel. Only two countries (not counting some war-torn collapsed states in developing countries, where there are no reliable statistics anyway) had higher murder rates—South Africa and Colombia—whereas in Brazil and Mexico, the figures are 50 per cent lower than Russia's. Even the US murder rate, the highest in the developed world—6–7 people per 100,000—pales in comparison with that of Russia.

When the murder rate reaches 40–50 people per 100,000, as it did in Colombia in the 1990s, the country faces a complete collapse of state authority and a decline into chaos and warlordism. The unprecedented increase in the crime rate in the 1990s, the shocking—but unpunished—murders of high-profile politicians, businessmen and journalists, left Russia's law enforcement agencies morally bankrupt and brought the state to the brink of losing its monopoly on violence.

The Russian rate of deaths from external causes (accidents, murders and suicides) had by the beginning of the twenty-first century skyrocketed to 245 per 100,000 inhabitants. This is higher than in any of the 187

FIGURE 14: *Mortality rate and average life expectancy, 1950–2006*TABLE I: *Deaths from external causes per 100,000 inhabitants, 2002*

	Total	Accidents	Suicides	Murders	Other
<i>Russia</i>	245	158	41	33	11
<i>Sierra Leone</i>	215	148	10	50	7
<i>Burundi</i>	213	64	7	18	124
<i>Angola</i>	191	131	8	40	13
<i>Belarus</i>	172	120	38	13	0
<i>Estonia</i>	168	124	29	15	0
<i>Kazakhstan</i>	157	100	37	20	0
<i>Ukraine</i>	151	100	36	15	0
<i>Côte d'Ivoire</i>	148	86	11	27	24
<i>Colombia</i>	134	36	6	72	19
<i>Niger</i>	133	113	6	14	0

'Other' deaths are due to unidentified external causes, wars, police operations or executions. Totals may differ from the sum of columns due to rounding. Source: World Health Organization

countries covered by WHO estimates in 2002 (see Table 1, opposite). It is equivalent to 2.45 deaths per 1,000 a year, or 159 per 1,000 over 65 years, which is the average life expectancy in Russia today. Put differently, if these rates continue to hold, 1 out of 6 Russians born in 2002 will have an 'unnatural' death. To be sure, in the 1980s murder, suicide and accidental death rates were quite high in Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Latvia, Estonia, Moldova and Kazakhstan—several times higher than in other former Soviet republics and in East European countries. However, they were roughly comparable to those of other countries with the same level of development. In the 1990s these rates rapidly increased, far outstripping those in the rest of the world.

The most important achievement of recent years is the improvement in social trends brought about by economic growth and political stability: the number of murders reached a peak in 2002 and fell in 2003–06; the suicide rate decreased in 2001–06 (Figure 13, above); the mortality rate stopped growing in 2004 (Figure 14, opposite); after reaching a 50-year low in 1999, the birth rate started to grow, the marriage rate increased and the divorce rate fell. On the other hand, a nearly 60 per cent increase in the crime rate in 2002–06 is most likely a sign of better recording of crimes. True, the improvements are very marginal, and have only appeared in the last two or three years, but at least there is a ray of hope that was previously entirely absent.

### *Rebuilding the state?*

The victory of 'Yedinstvo', the 'party of power', in the parliamentary elections of 1999 was, among other things, a victory for the have-nots (subsidized regions) over the haves (donor regions), which had joined forces in the Primakov–Luzhkov bloc 'Otechestvo–Vsyā Rossiya'. Putin tried to limit the all-powerful regions by changing the principles of fiscal federalism, appointing presidential viceroys in seven amalgamated regions and reforming the Federation Council, the upper chamber of the Russian parliament, which represented the interests of all 89 regions. In 1999, Putin began a second war against Chechnya, refusing to negotiate with the separatists, who are today largely defeated. He launched court cases against the 'oligarchs'—remaining within the limits of the law. A series of tycoons were accused of tax evasion and financial machinations; some emigrated, some were arrested. The only non-governmental television channel, NTV, was shut down

(incidentally, also for totally legitimate reasons: the 'oligarch' Gusinsky had refused to pay his debt to the state-owned Gazprom, having seemingly decided that freedom of speech was not worth that much money). Mikhail Khodorkovsky ended up in jail for fraud (taking oil profits to offshore locations via transfer pricing), and his company, Yukos, was bankrupted by the government; its assets were seized in place of the tax arrears destined for state coffers. Another oil company, Sibneft, was purchased on the open market by Gazprom, raising the state's share in the oil industry from less than 15 per cent in 2004 to over 30 per cent a year later.

But the improvement in social indicators has been the most important achievement of all. Economic growth and low inflation alone cannot prevent the disintegration of the country if social inequality and crime increase. Building the vertical of power and intensifying centralization may not prevent the collapse of the state, if they do not establish law and order more firmly and limit the extent of the shadow economy. In fact, Putin has been criticized precisely for taking ever more power into his own hands without greater order resulting. But it now seems that the first signs have appeared of a real, rather than an ephemeral, stabilization.

Putin's popularity can be explained primarily by his ability to stop the collapse of the state caused by the reforms of the 1990s. All other problems are dwarfed by the threat of social and national disintegration. The majority of Russian citizens are prepared to forgive Putin for his heavy-handed tactics in dealing with the 'oligarchs' and even with entrepreneurs of a lesser stature, for the 'purges' in Chechnya, and for the constraints placed on democracy and freedom of speech—all in the interests of strengthening law and order and curbing the boundless anarchy of the 1990s.

Polls conducted on the eve of the February 2004 elections asked Russians what they expected first and foremost of the new president. Fifty-eight per cent wanted him to restore Russia to its status as a great and respected power; 48 per cent to ensure a just distribution of income in the interests of ordinary people; 45 per cent to strengthen law and order; 43 per cent to put an end to the war in Chechnya; 41 per cent to return the money that ordinary people lost during the reforms; 39 per cent to strengthen the role of the state in the economy. Such priorities as 'keeping Russia on the road of reform' and 'continuing

the policy of closer ties with Western countries' garnered only 11 and 7 per cent respectively. 'Are you concerned that Putin could establish an iron-fisted dictatorship supported by the "power agencies"?' In January 2000, before Putin's first electoral victory, 34 per cent said yes to this question, while in January 2004, only 26 per cent held this view. Respectively, 57 and 67 per cent showed no concern.

### *Prospects*

Where is Russia headed? The future harbours many dangers. The current real exchange rate of the rouble (the ratio of domestic to world prices) is too high. It has been growing throughout the past five years and in 2006 exceeded the 1998 pre-crisis level. Therefore, a drop in world energy prices could easily provoke a new currency crisis and interrupt economic recovery, despite large currency reserves. Domestic fuel and energy prices remain many times lower than world levels, creating incentives for inefficient energy consumption; Russia has one of the highest ratios of energy use to GDP in the world. Unlike in Eastern European countries and many of the former Soviet republics, where the prices of fuel and energy have already reached or are approaching world levels, the restructuring of the Russian economy is still far from complete. What Russia should have done in recent years was to slowly devalue the rouble, and at the same time increase domestic prices for oil, gas and electricity, compensating producers for losses from the rising cost of energy with the stronger competitiveness that would result from the depreciating rouble. However, such a policy is not even on the drawing board at present.

A second danger is too rapid a decrease in taxes, which the government has already implemented (income tax, corporate tax and the unified social tax). Critics of such measures, including the IMF's Moscow office, justifiably point out that the current budget surpluses are based primarily on high prices for energy resources, and therefore, if these prices should fall, the government could once again find itself penniless. Moreover it is not the right time to reduce taxes when virtually all government services—health care, education, defence, law and order—are much worse off than the private-sector economy.

Other dangers remain: corruption, the inefficiency of the state apparatus, high levels of social inequity. But generally Russia is in better shape

today than seven years ago, when Putin assumed power. Russia now needs more than anything to strengthen law and order and to restore the institutional capacity of the state. Democracy is also needed, but only later, when the rule of law has been established. There is, of course, a danger that the leadership will use political centralization to line everyone up along the 'vertical of power' and eliminate opposition in order to live in serene comfort at the citizens' expense—and perhaps also to embark on the occasional escapade. This has happened in Russia before. But one must choose the lesser of two evils. Strengthening law and order is only possible under a centralized system. Without centralization, there is no chance at all of it happening; unbounded chaos and lawlessness would rule. This seems to be the choice facing Russia today.

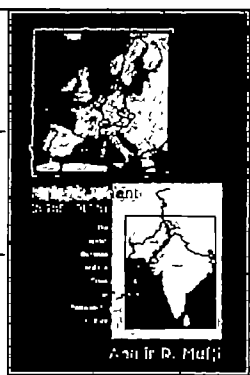


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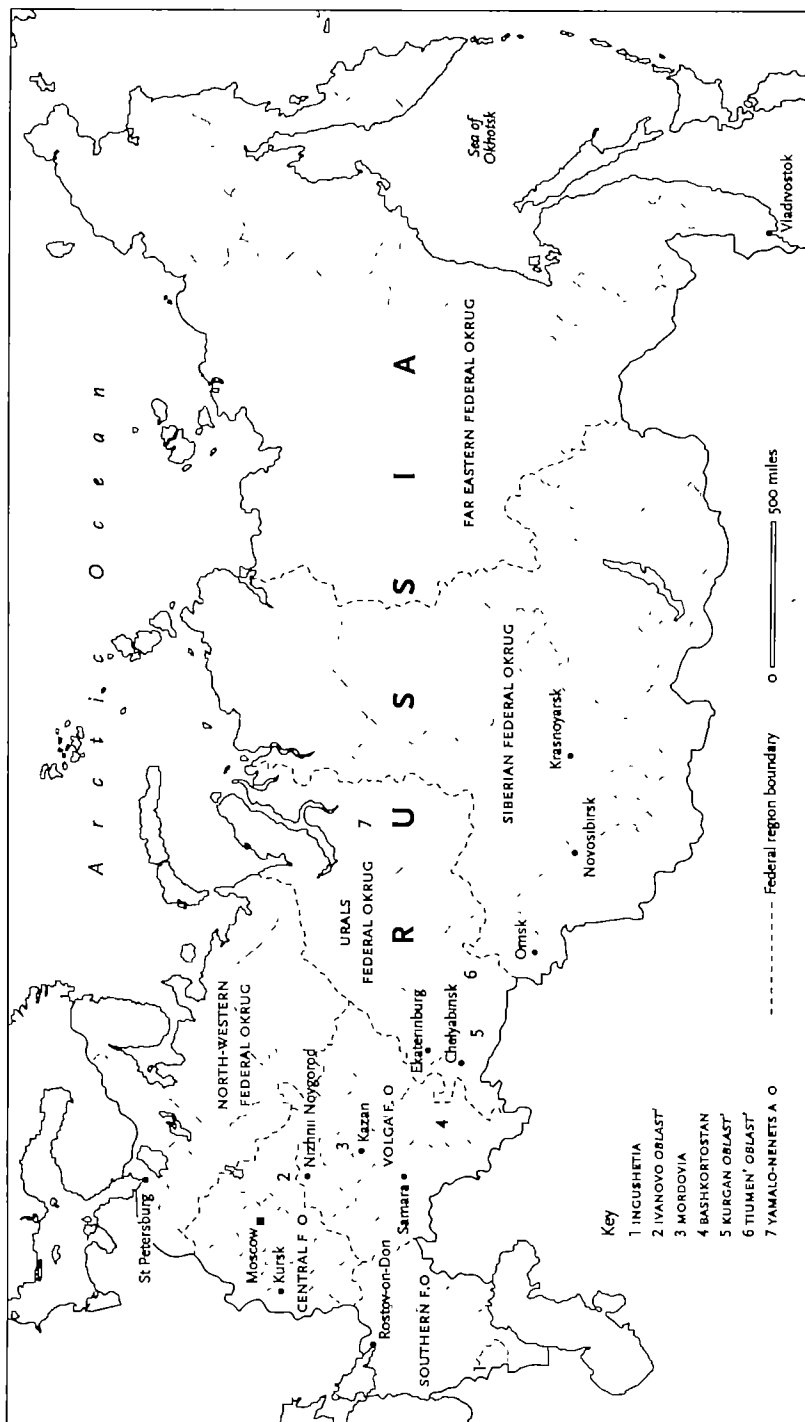
TONY WOOD

## CONTOURS OF THE PUTIN ERA

*A response to Vladimir Popov*

**I**N 'RUSSIA REDUX?', Vladimir Popov has provided a lucid reckoning of the terrible economic, political and human costs of the shock-therapy era. If Russia is in slightly better shape now than seven years ago, it is still significantly worse off than it was twenty years ago. As one striking graph after another demonstrates, GDP, investment and life expectancy have yet to return to their 1989 levels. What Popov terms 'the recession' has few comparisons in world economic history. Nevertheless, it is heartening that he can present data which point to significant improvements in several areas. After the ceaseless turbulence and moral bankruptcy of the Yeltsin years, the two administrations of Vladimir Putin have been widely characterized as inaugurating a new era of stability in Russia: state power has been reasserted and, thanks to high oil prices, GDP has grown markedly, government finances are in the black, and much of the country's external debt has been paid down. There has also been good news in the social sphere: the birth rate has risen, while the suicide and mortality rates have declined.

However, as Popov warns, there are many dangers ahead. The rouble is overvalued, and the economy is overly dependent on the current commodities bonanza. Moreover, the government has not used the windfall from natural resources to fund spending on public goods, and has even opted to further shrink the tax base. Nonetheless, Popov concludes that 'Russia is in better shape today than seven years ago', and asserts that the priority is to 'restore the institutional capacity of the state'. The erosion of democratic prerogatives that has accompanied Putin's recentralization drive is the price that must be paid for continuing stability; the alternative is chaos.





Popov's empirical approach is a much-needed corrective to the liberal-capitalist mirages of 'transitology', and to the Kremlin shadow-puppetry of the mainstream Russian media. Above all, it provides a solid basis on which to advance discussion. What follows is an attempt to probe further into the trends Popov has outlined. This is in part a matter of more detailed quantification—differentiating the elements of the overall picture, in order to see more clearly the imbalances between them. But a closer examination of Russia today also has far-reaching qualitative implications, which in turn will determine how—or indeed if—the hazards Popov has identified are addressed.

### *Disequilibria*

The rate at which Russian GDP has grown since the rouble collapse of August 1998 is significant, reaching a high of 10 per cent in 2000, and averaging between 4 and 7 per cent over 2001–06. The rising economic tide has lifted the incomes of many: the national average reached 10,287 roubles (\$350) per month in November 2006, compared to 2,281 roubles (around \$80) in 2000, while the poverty rate declined from 29 per cent in 2000 to 17.6 per cent in 2004. The country's Gini coefficient, the standard aggregate measure of income distribution, rose from 0.3 in 1992 to almost 0.5 in 1998, but by 2000 had dropped to 0.4, indicating that at least some of the staggering inequalities of the 1990s had been smoothed out. However, the Gini figure has since then begun to creep upwards: from 0.397 in 2000 to 0.409 in 2004.<sup>1</sup>

Two further qualifications should be made to this picture, relating to the social and geographical distribution of Russia's new prosperity. Wealth remains highly concentrated: in 2002, the top 20 per cent of the population by income accounted for 46.6 per cent of total income, the bottom quintile for only 6.1 per cent. The latter were faring worse in relative terms by 2004, when they commanded 5.6 per cent of total income.<sup>2</sup> Contemporary Russian society is to a large extent stratified by chronology: among those buffeted by the hurricane winds of shock

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<sup>1</sup> Federal'naya sluzhba gosudarstvennoi statistiki (RosStat, [www.gks.ru](http://www.gks.ru)) and UN Human Development Reports, 2002 and 2006. The official poverty line in 2004 was 2,376 roubles per month (then around \$85).

<sup>2</sup> UN Human Development Report 2006; Economist Intelligence Unit, *Russia Country Profile 2006* (henceforth EIU), p. 45. The latter drily notes: 'since it is generally assumed that in Russia income and the ability to evade taxes are positively correlated, actual income distribution is probably more unequal still.'

therapy in the 1990s, the elderly and the retired were prominent, as already meagre pensions went largely unpaid during the Yeltsin years. Here again the country's improving fortunes have helped, and the sums paid have even increased. However, they remain low—2,395 roubles a month (\$85) in 2005—and the monetization of a string of benefits in 2004 has stretched pensioners' resources still further. Their standard of living has been eroded by having to pay for transport and utilities they previously received for free, and by inflation—formerly in double figures, now at 9.7 per cent, and still likely to outpace any increase in the standard pension.

Geography is a crucial variable in assessing Russia's present condition. Both population and resources have always been distributed extremely unevenly across the country's vast territory. Industry is concentrated in European Russia, the Urals and the Arctic Circle; as a result, the per capita gross regional product of the Central Federal District, for instance, is two and a half times higher than that of the Southern steppe and North Caucasus. The capital's gravitational pull on the country's economy is extraordinary: Moscow alone accounts for 20 per cent of GDP. If we factor in the wider Moscow region, St Petersburg and Tiumen', only 'four regions produce nearly half of Russia's output'.<sup>3</sup> The present reliance on exports of oil, gas and metals has exacerbated existing imbalances by dramatically raising the wealth of resource-rich regions: annual per capita gross regional product in Tiumen' *oblast'*, for instance, stood at 575,411 roubles in 2004 (\$19,800), compared to 12,583 roubles (\$430) in Ingushetia, the Russian Federation's poorest sub-unit.<sup>4</sup> Needless to say, this torrent of cash has largely flowed into the coffers of extractor companies as profits, rather than to employees as wages.

Regional aggregate figures conceal further disparities. There are significant differences not only between regions, but within them. In the Central Federal Region, for instance, annual GRP per capita stood at \$4,350 in 2004, and the average yearly income at the end of 2006 was \$6,120. But the gap between the region's maxima and minima is vast: where the average annual income in Moscow is \$13,440, in Ivanovo

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<sup>3</sup> EIU, p. 45. It should be noted, however, that many Russian companies have their headquarters in Moscow, which inflates the city's figure substantially; nevertheless, this statistical bulge itself illustrates the capital's dominant role in the national economy.

<sup>4</sup> Figures from RosStat website.

*oblast'* it is a mere \$1,860—a ratio of over 7 : 1. Lower, but nonetheless significant, ratios obtained elsewhere: in the Urals, the average income of the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous *okrug* is nearly five times higher than that of Kurgan *oblast'*; inhabitants of Samara *oblast'* on the Volga earn two-and-a-half times as much, on average, as those of Mordovia.<sup>5</sup> Given the aforementioned concentration of industry, and corresponding focus of investment and employment opportunities, the distance between well-fed regions and lean zones seems set to widen in the years ahead. In such a context, the gradual increase in domestic fuel prices that Popov recommends in his conclusion would have vastly disparate impacts in different parts of the country and on diverse social sectors—reinforcing the dynamic of growing territorial and social inequality.

### *Stabilization and deceleration*

High global oil prices, coupled with the dominant role of natural resource extraction in the Russian economy, have resulted in a Slavic version of the 'Dutch disease'. Popov points to the consequent overvaluation of the real exchange rate as the principal reason for the effective slowdown in the rate of GDP growth since 2000. But a sequence of other, interconnected factors could be adduced, with significant longer-term implications.

Firstly, there is the matter of investment, both in terms of scale—relatively low, at less than 20 per cent of GDP—and character. The smashing of the planned economy in the 1990s led to large-scale de-industrialization in Russia, and what profits did accrue from surviving enterprises were largely funnelled out of the country into offshore accounts. The rouble collapse of 1998, in rendering exports more competitive, encouraged capitalists to repatriate some of this wealth. But as Simon Clarke notes, though investment has increased since the 1990s,

most of this . . . [has been] in piecemeal re-equipment and reconstruction of existing facilities to maintain or expand existing production capacity in a favourable market environment, rather than in the construction of new plants which will be able to produce to world cost and quality standards and actively expand the market.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Figures from RosStat website.

<sup>6</sup> Simon Clarke, 'A Very Soviet Form of Capitalism? The Management of Holding Companies in Russia', *Post-Communist Economics*, vol. 16, no. 4 (2004), p. 420.

The direction of investment towards existing capacity, rather than towards diversifying the economy, may partly explain why the volume of imports increased by nearly 20 per cent in 2003–05: even in auspicious macroeconomic circumstances, domestic goods have been unable to compete with foreign-produced ones in many sectors.<sup>7</sup> This seeming unwillingness to devote funds to broadening the base of the Russian economy—and so the basis for future profits—suggests that the Russian business elite remains largely extractive in nature. Unless and until this orientation changes, GDP growth will continue to depend above all on the vagaries of global oil prices.

The reluctance to invest is not confined to the private sector. In 2004, the Russian government set up a Stabilization Fund in which the dizzying quantities of petroubles would accumulate. Any revenues from sales of oil over a price of \$27 per barrel for Urals crude are now paid into the fund, the balance of which peaked in June 2006 at just under \$80bn.<sup>8</sup> Yet as Popov observes, the Putin administration has ‘failed to use windfall revenues from oil and gas exports . . . to repair badly damaged state institutions and to restore the provision of crucial public goods’.<sup>9</sup> Some of the ‘Stabfond’ booty has been used to pay down external debt and cover pension arrears; but since the summer of 2006, it has been almost exclusively spent on foreign currency—45 per cent on dollars, 45 per cent on euros, 10 per cent on sterling. Between July 2006 and the end of January 2007, cumulative spending on foreign currency from the Stabfond reached 2.4 trillion roubles, or \$91bn—on top of the \$250bn in foreign reserves the state already possessed by June 2006.<sup>10</sup>

In a country where ‘as many as one hospital in five still lacks hot water and sewerage facilities’, where ‘state funding pays for less than one-third of the operating costs of state universities’, a government awash with cash has nonetheless opted not to spend much of it on public goods.<sup>11</sup> Instead, it has poured its resources into global capital markets, to ‘finance oil importers’ bigger current-account deficits—in effect, lending the increase in fuel bills back to consumers’, and propping up their

<sup>7</sup> EIU, p. 43.

<sup>8</sup> Elena Lebedinskaia, ‘Stabfond: segodnia, zavtra . . . navsegda’, *Neprikosnovennyi zapas*, no. 50 (2006); figures from Ministerstvo Finansov, [www.minfin.ru](http://www.minfin.ru).

<sup>9</sup> Popov, ‘Russia Redux’, NLR 44, March–April 2007, p. 43.

<sup>10</sup> *Financial Times*, 9 June 2006, figures from Ministerstvo Finansov and EIU, *Russia Country Report*, September 2006, p. 39.

<sup>11</sup> EIU, p. 24.

economies rather than redressing the imbalances of its own.<sup>12</sup> This, it should be stressed, is in addition to running a budget surplus of 7.7 per cent of GDP in 2005, and implementing a series of regressive changes to the tax regime since 2001—including a flat income-tax rate of 13 per cent and a cut in corporate tax from 35 to 24 per cent—that have systematically favoured corporate wealth at the expense of ordinary citizens.<sup>13</sup>

### *Who rules Russia?*

The Putin government's choice of spending priorities—bolstering the euro and the tumbling dollar rather than providing for the needs of its own people—and the reluctance of Russia's entrepreneurs to invest in expanding domestic markets, raise fundamental questions as to the overall strategy of Russia's current business and political elite. Before addressing these, however, we need first to tackle a more basic matter: who are Russia's new rulers?

Much has been written about the rise of representatives of the 'power structures' under Putin, one-time KGB Lieutenant Colonel and, prior to his elevation to the premiership and presidency, director of the FSB, successor agency to the KGB. Drawn from the ranks of the military and security services, *siloviki* are indeed prominent in the current Russian leadership: according to Olga Kryshtanovskaya and Stephen White, *siloviki* composed 58.3 per cent of the Security Council in 2003, compared to 33.3 per cent in 1993, and a mere 4.8 per cent in the Politburo of 1988. They have also increased as a proportion of the regional elite: of 88 heads of federal sub-units, 2.2 per cent were drawn from military or security circles in 1993, rising to 4.5 per cent in 1999, and then surging to 10.2 per cent in 2003.<sup>14</sup> Of most concern to those fearing an authoritarian restoration is the fact that many of these appointees remain within the 'active reserve' of their original ministry—from which they are effectively seconded, and for which they are supposed to prepare a monthly report on their activities.

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<sup>12</sup> *Economist*, 10 November 2005.

<sup>13</sup> EIU, pp. 66, 39

<sup>14</sup> Olga Kryshtanovskaya and Stephen White, 'Putin's Militocracy', *Post-Soviet Affairs*, vol. 19, no. 4 (2003), pp. 289–306. I have cited the figures for the most tightly defined groups, rather than the much higher aggregate figure calculated by Kryshtanovskaya and White, for important methodological qualifications to their data, see Sharon Werning Rivera and David Rivera, 'The Russian Elite under Putin. Militocratic or Bourgeois?', *Post-Soviet Affairs*, vol. 22, no. 2 (2006), pp. 125–44.

The melding of security services and political power is a salient characteristic of Putin's Russia; a point to which I will return. Perhaps even more striking, however, has been the swelling presence of business in the state. The rouble collapse of 1998 profoundly altered the character and composition of the Russian business elite, virtually sweeping away Moscow-based banking and finance, while the sudden boost to domestic production resulting from default and devaluation led to a rise in the weight of the real sector—and a corresponding new prominence of industrial regions. Where the 1990s scene was dominated by a handful of 'oligarchs', at the turn of the century political influence and economic throw-weight was distributed across a larger, more geographically dispersed pool of individuals, with closer affiliations to the state apparatus than their tycoon predecessors. Indeed, an examination of the trajectories of the new business elite reveals that in 2001, 29 per cent had a *nomenklatura* background, up from 24 per cent in 1993; Kryshtanovskaya and White further observe that 'the main source of recruitment of the business elite is government ministries'.<sup>15</sup>

Conversely, business has been a significant source of state cadres. This applies at all levels: a whole section of Putin's Presidential Administration was drawn from the ranks of Alfa Bank, while as Table 1 (opposite) shows, by 2003 some 20 per cent of the government was drawn from business, which provided almost the same proportion of Duma deputies. The representation of business in the upper house of the Russian Federal Assembly was still higher: in 2002, almost a third of Federation Council members came from private enterprises.<sup>16</sup> More than a dozen Russian regions, resource-rich ones prominent among them, are now headed by businessmen from major local companies.

The upshot of the 1998 rouble collapse, then, was a 'renegotiation, but not a dissolution, of the interpenetration of business and government that defines an oligarchy.'<sup>17</sup> Indeed, with Putin's successive appointments, since 2001, of key government figures and allies as chairmen of state companies, the relations between business and officialdom have become still closer. The two are now, in the words of the *Financial Times*,

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<sup>15</sup> Kryshtanovskaya and White, 'The rise of the Russian business elite', *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 38 (2005), p. 300.

<sup>16</sup> Andrew Barnes, 'Russia's New Business Groups and State Power', *Post-Soviet Affairs*, vol. 19, no. 2 (2003), p. 180.

<sup>17</sup> Kryshtanovskaya and White, 'Rise of the Russian business elite', p. 295.

TABLE 1: *Business representation in elite groups (percentages)*

	<i>Top leadership</i>	<i>Duma deputies</i>	<i>Government</i>	<i>Regional elite</i>	<i>Overall</i>
Yeltsin cohort (1993)	2.3	12.8	0	2.6	4.4
Putin cohort (2002)	15.7	17.3	4.2	8.1	9.3
Putin cohort (2003)	9.1	17.3	20	12.5	14.7

Source: Kryshтанovskaya and White, 'Rise of the Russian business elite', Table 4, p. 303.

'extraordinarily intertwined': Deputy Prime Minister Dmitri Medvedev is also chairman of Gazprom; Putin's deputy chief of staff, Igor Sechin, is also chairman of Rosneft. Taking the Presidential Administration as a whole, '11 members chaired 6 state companies and had 12 further state directorships; 15 senior government officials held 6 chairmanships and 24 other board seats.' Many members of the government are also rumoured to have significant, undisclosed business interests—such as the Communications Minister, Leonid Reiman, who allegedly still holds a stake in the phone company he co-founded, Telekominvest.<sup>18</sup>

The *Financial Times* has described Putin's immediate entourage as the 'quasi-board of what might be called Russia, Inc.' The broad extent to which state and business have merged, and the amphibious character of functionaries and executives, initially suggest that this would be an apt term for the country as a whole. The question arises, however, as to which of the Russian elite's two faces—business and state—predominates; which fractions set longer-term goals and priorities?

### *Elite orientations*

The reassertion of state control over strategic companies and sectors has been seen as a sign of stealth nationalization—the state using its

<sup>18</sup> *Financial Times*, 19 June 2006; and William Tompson, 'Putin and the "Oligarchs": A Two-Sided Commitment Problem', in Alex Pravda, ed., *Leading Russia: Putin in Perspective*, Oxford 2005, p. 193.

administrative powers to crush Khodorkovsky's YUKOS and, more recently, even muscle aside multinational companies such as Shell. Western establishment analysts have diagnosed these developments as a case of 'resource nationalism', likening Putin's actions to those of Chávez or Morales, while the latest leitmotif of Russian political discourse has been the idea of 'sovereign democracy'—essentially referring to Russia's ability and determination to pursue an independent course, no longer reliant on loans or approbation from the West.

Neither of these concepts is an adequate measure of the orientation and outlook of Russia's contemporary elite. As noted above, the Putin administration has not actively redistributed oil wealth to those dispossessed by the 'reforms' of the 1990s; indeed, its tax regime seeks precisely to benefit the wealthy still further, while the monetization of benefits and increased charges for utilities penalize the poor. Though the poverty rate is declining and wages rising, any significant drop in oil prices will likely reverse these trends, which will once again have the most severe impact on the lowest income strata. The decision to spend the oil windfall on euros and dollars, meanwhile, is ostensibly motivated by a desire to keep inflation in check; but in a context of continued infrastructural dysfunction, such prudence is a form of deferred suicide, starving the nation of the public goods that would secure its survival in the longer term.

Popov criticizes the decision not to spend oil revenues on public goods and infrastructure, but does not pose the question of why it was made. It is clear, however, that for all the nationalist rhetoric emanating from the Kremlin, it is not the livelihoods and prospects of its own citizens with which Russia's rulers are concerned. Rather, it is the continued flow of oil out and money in which they seek to secure, distributing largesse to the silent *narod* when electoral needs dictate, but otherwise focused on the twin prizes of profits and power.

The relationship between these is perhaps the structuring feature of Russia today: administrative power provides crucial tools for business success, while commercial considerations often dictate the allocation of state assets and offices. The convergence of state and business is in that sense far more than a coalition of the self-interested: it is a symbiosis rooted in the neo-patrimonial form assumed by capitalism in Russia. For the state has been the key structure through which the country's



capitalists have pursued their economic interests—using its officials to secure the outcome of privatizations; to facilitate hostile (often armed) takeovers, asset-stripping and money laundering; to defer or conceal tax debts; even to act as paid protection against organized crime. At a meeting with the country's most prominent tycoons in July 2000, Putin revealingly pointed to 'the fact that you have yourselves to a significant extent formed this state, through political and quasi-political structures under your control'—adding that 'perhaps what one should do least of all is blame the mirror.'<sup>19</sup>

In the twenty-first century, the state has become the indispensable guarantor of property acquired in the 1990s. Many have seen in Putin's selective persecution of the 'oligarchs' since 2000 a forceful reassertion of state prerogatives and authority over business. However, this is to overlook the extent to which a strengthening of state power serves precisely the interests of Russia's business elite. OECD economist William Tompson observes that 'for Russia's new rich, state-building and structural reform were intended to consolidate the victories they had won in the 1990s.'<sup>20</sup> In a context where state and business overlap so extensively, an expansion of state power has often simply meant an exponential increase in the coercive strategies available to business groups.<sup>21</sup> While the centralizing rhetoric of the national leadership has gained in stridency, business elites have shifted their attention to securing the services of the state apparatus at regional and local levels, where 'state resources . . . are rented to powerful and expanding business groups'.<sup>22</sup> The phenomenon of state 'capture' that characterized the 1990s has, then, been modified in form rather than substantively reduced.

The resulting formation could be described as one in which the state has little or no autonomy from the economic interests of Russia's elite. The fractions of this state-business alloy consist of both state actors and business groups, who combine according to common economic

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<sup>19</sup> Tompson, 'Putin and the "Oligarchs"', p. 182.

<sup>20</sup> Tompson, 'Putin and the "Oligarchs"', p. 188.

<sup>21</sup> Vadim Volkov has concluded that in the period since 2000, 'the major instruments of aggressive enterprise takeovers are corrupt state organizations that have judicial and coercive power.' Volkov, 'The Selective Use of State Capacity in Russia's Economy: Property Disputes and Enterprise Takeovers After 2000', *PONARS Policy Memo* no. 273, October 2002.

<sup>22</sup> Volkov, 'Selective Use of State Capacity'.

interests. Divisions on forward policy—such as the further liberalization and lowering of tariff barriers required for WTO entry—take place along sectoral lines, with many export-oriented manufacturers and still-fragile banks aligned with proponents of ‘sovereignty’, against liberal supporters of increased integration into the global economy. The influence of the two main tendencies fluctuates, with Putin hovering above the fray—and deliberately working to maintain the fragmentation of domains and interests that has thus far blocked the emergence of a unified capitalist class.

Putin enjoys considerable support among the general populace, but this has a shallow, plebiscitary character, and should not be mistaken for a broad social consensus on which the elite as a whole could depend. Indeed, Russia’s rulers have been unable to forge an ideology with any consistent appeal; the recent cultivation of nationalist sentiments has mostly taken the form of post-imperial spasms, rather than a coherent vision that would enable them to exert moral leadership. They instead hold sway over the atomized populace through a combination of electoral approval for Putin himself and various unformalized mechanisms of coercion. These play a more prominent role than Popov’s analysis—where crime, corruption and the informal sector appear as mere by-products of an unstable conjuncture—would suggest. Indeed, they are integral to the functioning of Putin’s Russia, and as such are critical to any understanding of its future course.

### *Symptoms of informality*

The principal administrative change wrought by Putin has been a formidable re-centralization; the ‘vertical of power’, in the President’s own phrase, has been firmly planted in the country’s soil. This has meant, on the one hand, increased efficiency in the basic functioning of the state—above all in the collection of taxes—and the assumption, to a higher degree than in the Soviet period, of civilian posts by military and security service personnel. On the other hand, increased centralization has had at least two other, less widely remarked consequences. Firstly, the federal centre has not done away with regional structures, but rather has simply created a new layer of state employees who usurp the functions of their counterparts, without displacing them altogether. Hence, in part, the phenomenal bureaucratization of the Russian state: there are now 1.3 million functionaries, more than twice as many as the USSR had

prior to its dissolution.<sup>23</sup> Secondly, it is not only authority that has been centralized: the shadow world of corruption has been similarly reorganized. According to research by the Russian think-tank INDEM, although the quantity of bribes decreased by 20 per cent over 2001–05, the average size of a bribe actually increased thirteen-fold.<sup>24</sup> The same study estimated the volume of business corruption at \$316bn, while the Russian deputy general procurator put it at \$214bn. Either way, as Leonid Kosals observes, ‘both figures exceed the scale of revenues of the Russian federal budget’—adding that the growth of corruption ‘is roughly tenfold, which is many times greater than the growth of the economy as a whole.’<sup>25</sup>

The scale of corruption in Russia stems above all from the continued prevalence of informal practices in all spheres of society—in turn a product of what Georgi Derluguian has called the ‘persistent under-institutionalization of Russian life’.<sup>26</sup> In political terms, the lack of institutions gives rise to widespread personalism, which at the very least sustains a ferment of cliques and factions—witness the number of St Petersburgers in Putin’s retinue. It also frequently clears the way for brazen nepotism. To cite only two of countless examples: between 1996 and 2000 the Kursk *oblast*’s oil concern, pharmacies, public security and cultural affairs were placed into the hands of his relatives by the then-governor Aleksandr Rutskoi; while much of Bashkortostan’s economic life today lies in the purview of president Murtaza Rakhimov’s family.

There are, of course, plenty of similarly egregious cases elsewhere in the world. But the personalism that facilitates such corruption is part of a whole complex of informal practices on which the post-Soviet order relies. As Alena Ledeneva has argued, ‘the informal component is an integral part of political power in Russia, which makes it both efficient and dependent on the unwritten rules, their non-transparency, and the selectivity of law-enforcement.’<sup>27</sup> Hence, for instance, the dismemberment of YUKOS did not aim solely to transfer prize assets to companies connected

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<sup>23</sup> EIU, p. 9.

<sup>24</sup> Cited in Leonid Kosals, ‘Klanovyi kapitalizm v Rossiī, *Neprikosnovennyi zapas*, 50 (2006), p. 196.

<sup>25</sup> Kosals, ‘Klanovyi kapitalizm’, p. 191.

<sup>26</sup> Georgi Derluguian, ‘Under Fond Western Eyes’, *NLR* 24, November–December 2003, p. 138.

<sup>27</sup> Alena Ledeneva, *How Russia Really Works: The Informal Practices that Shaped Post-Soviet Politics and Business*, Ithaca, NY 2006, p. 188.

to the government; it also deliberately sought to create uncertainty among investors as to the rules of the game—preserving the prerogative of state officials to uphold or overturn property rights, according to the interests of their own fractions.

The Russian economy has long possessed a sizeable shadow sector. In the Soviet period, it was above all a mechanism for coping with shortages; similarly, in the 1990s, when cash was in short supply and, as Popov records, ‘the payment system was on the brink of collapse’, barter deals made up 50 per cent of total transactions and the shadow economy accounted for between 40 and 50 per cent of GDP.<sup>28</sup> The commodities boom has ensured a substantial monetization of the economy, but Popov warns that barter and non-payment could surface once more, ‘if the authorities resort to tight monetary policy’. This somewhat understates the extent to which informal economic mechanisms are a permanent feature of Russia’s socio-economic landscape. Again, the favourable macroeconomic climate conceals the persistence of unofficial channels; where the latter ‘were used in the Soviet economy to protect enterprises from the exigencies of the plan’, present-day recourse to them ‘protects companies from the exigencies of the market.’<sup>29</sup>

### *Crime and colonial war*

According to Popov, ‘the scale and scope of criminality in Russian society remains vast’. The murder rate currently stands at over 20 per 1,000—three times as high as that of the US, and ten times that of Western and Eastern Europe, Canada, China and Japan. Still, this is lower than before. There has, however, been a 60 per cent increase in the overall crime rate over 2002–06. Popov contends that this is ‘most likely a sign of better recording of crimes’.<sup>30</sup> Many would not share his confidence. A higher degree of (real or perceived) official competence no doubt encourages people to report crimes; but enough to account for a 50 per cent rise, over an already high rate? The persistence of informal practices mentioned above, the continued and growing corruption, and the further entrenchment of income inequalities, all work to expand the social fractures in which crime thrives. The fact that the law is manifestly an instrument at

<sup>28</sup> Popov, ‘Russia Redux?’, p. 44; Kosals, ‘Klanovyi kapitalizm’, p. 184.

<sup>29</sup> Ledeneva, *How Russia Really Works*, p. 118.

<sup>30</sup> Popov, ‘Russia Redux?’, pp. 46, 49.

the service of particular interests and factions has arguably done much to undermine respect for legality.

But it is Putin's continued use of force that has contributed most to the legitimization of violence in the country as a whole. The war in Chechnya, waged with even greater ferocity than that of 1994–96, propelled him to the presidency in 2000, and has played a vital role in his consolidation of an authoritarian system: crushing Chechen aspirations to independence was the militarized component of Putin's re-centralization drive, and his uncompromising stance underpinned much of his initial public appeal. Popov glides past the atrocities and ongoing occupation, noting only that 'today the separatists are largely defeated'. Russian military and government spokesmen have declared victory several times—starting with Putin himself as early as 2000—but with the war now in its eighth year, no end is in sight. The Russian army continues to suffer casualties at an average rate of around 3 per week, picked off by a small but highly mobile resistance; the puppet regime Moscow has set in place consistently kidnaps, tortures and kills its countrymen, and is bereft of all legitimacy. There is no viewpoint from which Putin's war on Chechnya could be considered a success. Popov himself provides indirect confirmation of its failure when he refers to the 43 per cent of the population who in early 2004 wished the president to end it; by late 2006, the proportion of those in favour of negotiations with the separatists stood at 64 per cent.<sup>31</sup>

The war is a catastrophe whose consequences stretch far beyond the North Caucasus. In Russian society as a whole, Putin's counter-insurgency in Chechnya has fostered an upsurge in xenophobia and unapologetic imperialism, the killing of tens of thousands of Chechens portrayed as essential to the survival of Russia as a state. It has had a more directly damaging impact on over a million Russians, ranging from raw conscripts to mercenaries to law enforcement officers, who have passed through Chechnya since 1994: all of them have either committed or witnessed acts of boundless brutality, and for all of them, unlimited force is an officially sanctioned mode of conduct. The psychological trauma inflicted on soldiers by the war has been termed 'Chechen syndrome'. But the insidious symptoms of aggression are not

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<sup>31</sup> Popov, 'Russia Redux?', p. 50; poll data from Levada Centre, [www.levada.ru](http://www.levada.ru).

confined to veterans' minds; they have become rooted in Russian public and political life.

### *The lesser evil?*

Popov concludes by emphasizing the need to choose the lesser evil of centralization and potential authoritarianism over the inevitable unravelling and chaos that will accompany any other course. Stability is the prime consideration; democracy can wait until more favourable circumstances develop. The question that immediately arises is: stability for whom? From the foregoing analysis, it should be clear that Russia's rulers have little interest in the fortunes of the general populace; the current priority is rather to use the country's natural resources to leverage a greater role in global affairs, and so carve out further opportunities for the internationalization of Russian capital. Entry into the WTO will assist in the latter goal, though it will also bring with it a dismantling of the protections that have served Russian industry well, and undermine recent attempts to revive manufacturing in the automobile and aviation sectors. To the dangers Popov lists, then, we should add the exposure to international capitalist pressures and widening of existing inequalities that inevitably accompany WTO accession. These forms of destabilization will, of course, largely bypass the fractions of business and state most actively seeking them.

Finally, there is the matter of the lesser evil. Popov poses the alternatives in stark terms: the status quo or utter disaster. Such logic has long helped to rally critics of various kinds to otherwise unpalatable governments. But it is precisely the immunity from challenge or debate that enables crime, coercion and corruption to flourish; conversely, it is the availability of alternative proposals for future paths of development that constitutes the political health of a nation. Popov's analysis presents many points from which such a discussion could begin.

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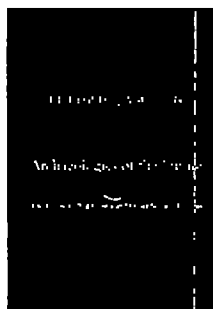
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## MEDELLÍN'S MAKEOVER

**I**N THE FACE of a string of leftist successes in the Andes, with radical-populists elected in Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador, the Right can boast one spectacular triumph. Medellín, the most conservative city in Colombia, the continent's most conservative country, has been undergoing a dramatic boom for the past few years. Levels of high-rise construction now surpass those of Los Angeles and New York combined. Since 2002, the profusion of apartment towers, luxury hotels, supermarkets and shopping malls has been breathtaking. The country's largest conglomerates and over seventy foreign enterprises now have their Colombian headquarters in Medellín, among them Phillip Morris, Kimberly Clark, Levi Strauss, Renault, Toyota and Mitsubishi. A 30,000 square-foot convention centre opened in 2005, and over a dozen international conferences have been held there annually, generating more than \$100 million in investment and business deals. Medellín's fashion industry is at present second only to São Paulo's; its medical sector is a Latin American leader in organ transplants, AIDS and cancer research. An upscale museum-park complex in the city centre, replacing the old outdoor market and red-light district, houses the work of world-renowned Medellín artist, Fernando Botero, with his sculptures featured in an open-air setting.

In 2005 Colombian TV launched a local version of the US programme, 'Extreme Makeover', in which contestants submit to the cosmetic surgeon's knife and emerge with a radically altered appearance. In Medellín, the show's popularity was emblematic of the city's own transformation over the last half-decade. Medellín is a media-saturated, image-conscious city, dominated by advertising and public relations; billboards abound. So it is impossible to avoid the message, projected by civic boosters of every

stripe, that Medellín is improving at breakneck speed. With the consolidation of a *de facto* pact between right-wing narco-paramilitary forces, on the one hand, and a media-friendly centre-left municipal government on the other, Medellín itself has undergone a series of cosmetic operations quite as drastic as anything on TV. During the 1980s the city had been notorious as the home of narco-baron Pablo Escobar's Medellín Cartel. It ranked as the homicide capital of the world: between 1990 and 2002, 55,000 people were murdered in Medellín, mainly young men. The velocity of the change has been startling, even for cocaine capitalism: the city's homicide rate has been reduced by a factor of six, and by 2005 was distinctly lower than those of Detroit, Baltimore or Washington, DC.<sup>1</sup> To cap it all, in 2006 Medellín's native son, Álvaro Uribe Vélez, succeeded in winning a historic second term as Colombia's President, having pushed through the necessary re-write of the national constitution. What follows is an effort to understand the nature of the plastic surgery involved in Medellín's new look by analysing the evolution of youth gangs, the cocaine business, leftist guerrillas and paramilitaries in the transition to a service-sector economy.

### *From gold to coffee*

Medellín's role as the capital of reaction in Latin America—and as the motor force in the politics of Uribe's Colombia—can only be understood in terms of its longer-term place in the country's history. Its contemporary particularities reflect patterns of class, racial and regional formation inherited from the past two centuries. Medellín is situated in a broad upland valley, with mountain ranges to its east and west, in the ranching and coffee-growing province of Antioquia, where a deeply conservative Catholic Church has long been entrenched. Founded as a gold-mining town and trading centre in 1675, Medellín emerged as the region's commercial capital by the late 18th century; its merchants profiting from the export of slave-mined gold and the long-distance overland trade in cheap imported commodities. In the 1880s the region became the epicentre of the new coffee boom, tying Medellín more closely to its rural hinterland: the city's merchant bankers controlled the credit, pricing, distribution and transportation of the crop, while coffee-growing smallholders colonized the Andean uplands. These *paisas*—‘countrymen’: the Antioquians' name for themselves—were united by a tenacious

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<sup>1</sup> 2005 homicide rates, per 100,000: Washington, DC: 45; Baltimore: 42; Detroit: 42; Medellín: 32.5.

regional-chauvinist ideology: hard-working, light-skinned Catholic conservatives, identified against the 'lazy' and undisciplined indigenous and Afro-Colombians in the south.<sup>2</sup>

Fin-de-siècle banking crashes prompted *antioqueño* coffee merchants to diversify from a single cash-crop, vulnerable to price collapses on the international market, into light manufacturing. From the start, industrialization in Medellín developed out of local entrepreneurial initiatives and capital formation, rather than as a result of US investment or franchises. By the beginning of the 20th century Antioquia—having emerged unscathed from the three-year civil conflict of 1899–1902, known as the War of a Thousand Days—had moved to the centre of national economic life, and Medellín became an important nexus for investment, speculation and the accumulation of value. The coffee boom, together with rapid industrial growth, spurred urban expansion: Medellín's population doubled to 100,000 in the first two decades of the 20th century, and the organization and occupation of urban space changed dramatically as *paisa* elites adopted a self-consciously modernizing ideology.

Urban planning was institutionalized in 1899—thirty years before New York City's Regional Planning Association—through the Sociedad de Mejoras Públicas, a 'society for public improvements' run at the behest of the business lobby. The SMP allocated municipal contracts for parks, roads and neighbourhoods, and organized the paving of Santa Elena Canyon. An electricity plant was built in 1897, and streetlighting installed in 1898. In 1889 an engineering school supplemented the city's first university, founded as early as 1871. Medellín had a regulated slaughterhouse in 1911, sewage treatment in 1913 and trolley cars by 1919.<sup>3</sup>

### *Catholic corporatism*

Most crucial for Medellín's subsequent development, however, was its burgeoning textile industry. Don Emilio Restrepo founded the region's first cotton mill in 1905, converting the nearby town of Bello into an industrial suburb. The initial workforce largely consisted of young

<sup>2</sup> See Nancy Appelbaum, *Muddied Waters: Race, Religion and Local History in Colombia, 1848–1946*, Durham, NC 2003, pp. 31–51.

<sup>3</sup> Fernando Botero Herrera, *Medellín, 1890–1950: Historia urbana y juego de intereses*, Medellín 1996, pp. 30–63. *El Espectador*, Colombia's leading liberal newspaper, was founded in Medellín in 1887, only shifting permanently to Bogotá in 1923.

women from the surrounding countryside. Textile factories offered a 'respectable' occupation, under the patriarchal protection of family firms and the Catholic Church. The Jesuits—following Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum*—were an important influence on the first-generation working class, which enjoyed relatively good wages, benefits and labour legislation. At the same time, migration from the rural coffee *municipios* of southern and southeastern Antioquia was crucial to the formation of Medellín's political culture, bringing a paternalist pattern of clientelism to the new industrial setting.

Led by the Restrepos and the Echeverrías, the city's industrialists exercised a personalized authority, reproducing modes of domination characteristic of domestic servitude. Catholic Social Action influenced the management of Don Jorge Echeverría's business empire—the two largest firms were Coltejer (founded in 1907) and Fabricato (1923)—emphasizing 'absolute personal loyalty and obedience' to help shape a working-class ethos of vertical ties to *patrones* and prompt, efficient execution of orders. Catholic elites and middle classes adopted an ideology of private charity and good works: the obligations of social betters to perceived inferiors. Where it emerged—as in a Communist-led strike wave in the mid-1930s—independent labour action was ruthlessly crushed.

The expanding city was largely managed through the SMP, which regulated urban space—prohibiting the carting of goods by mule train, for example, in order to make way for trams, cars and bicycles; horses, cattle and donkeys were to be kept outside the city. The SMP oversaw the construction of middle- and working-class suburbs, and tore down historic sections of the centre to make way for new buildings and office blocks. They also pressured landowners to convert rural areas of the city into the urban fabric. Avenida La Playa was readied for trams and cars, to carry workers and middle-class professionals to work from outlying neighbourhoods during the 1920s and 30s. Antioquia's regional development regime—industrialization, transport and communications networks, and urban restructuring—served as a model for the rest of the country, as state elites translated economic clout into national political advantage between 1904 and 1920. The coffee bourgeoisie invested in banking, industry and urban real estate, becoming expert speculators.

Import-substitute industrialization and production for the national market were the twin supports of this system in the postwar period. Light

manufacturing—beverages, textiles (woollens and cotton), food, candy, cigarettes, coffee packing—was protected from competition by high tariffs on imported goods, and subsidized by generous government loans and credit terms as well as infrastructural development. Investment in industry was coordinated with state economic policy, especially after the mid-1940s. Cotton manufacturing in Medellín became 'the crowning achievement' of the Colombian path to modernization.<sup>4</sup> The city's leaders were active forces in the formation of ANDI, the National Industrialists' Association, and FEDECAFE, the Coffee Growers' Federation, as powerful national lobbies to push for their class interests.

Industrial paternalism—initially the self-proclaimed 'protector' of the single working-girl's virginity—was revamped in the 1940s and 50s, as a second generation of industrialists took the reins of their family firms. The Restrepo and Echeverrías were convinced that the modern industrial factory could be made into a 'mechanism for preventing the spread of communist agitation in Colombia' as well as 'a model for society at large'; this would be the new idiom for oligarchic rule.<sup>5</sup> Women were as systematically removed from mill jobs as they had been recruited into them thirty years earlier, replaced by male 'breadwinners' with dependent households. For textile workers, who formed a small, relatively privileged minority of the Medellín proletariat, wage levels were high enough to permit consumption of domestic and imported goods; benefits included recreation, health and schooling. Unlike other industrial centres in Colombia—Barrancabermeja, Barranquilla, Cali, Santa Marta—organized labour in Medellín did not forge a distinctive tradition of independent class politics. Outside the Jesuit-led Unión de Trabajadores Colombianos (UTC), founded in 1946, the working class was fragmented. This was the golden age for Medellín's merchant-industrialist elite. In 1947 *Life* magazine tagged the city a 'capitalist paradise'. The 'Manchester of Colombia' had skyscrapers, cinemas and theatres, wide avenues, parks and monuments, schools and universities, commercial boulevards for pedestrians and a local railroad system; as well as innumerable well-endowed churches, their edifices bulking over every neighbourhood. The city's equatorial-mountain climate, hovering at 22°, promised an 'eternal spring'.

<sup>4</sup> Ann Farnsworth-Alvear, *Dulcinea in the Factory. Myths, Morals, Men, and Women in Colombia's Industrial Experiment, 1905–1960*, Durham, NC 2000, p. 14.

<sup>5</sup> Farnsworth-Alvear, *Dulcinea*, pp. 14, 53.

Even after the assassination of the populist Liberal leader Jorge Eliécer Gaitán in 1948, when much of Colombia was plunged into the murderous civil conflict of La Violencia which wiped out any hopes of an opening for left reformism within the state-sanctioned political arena, Medellín remained untouched by the general carnage.<sup>6</sup> In terms of profit rates and class collaboration, the city's economy continued to run smoothly—indeed, in 1947 and 1949, industrial production surpassed previous records. Though themselves supporters of the Conservative President Mariano Ospina and, after 1950, of the hard-right Laureano Gómez, *paisa* industrialists prohibited partisan propaganda in their factories during La Violencia, even if elites gave tacit sanction to killings in the peripheral municipalities.<sup>7</sup> Migrants who found jobs in the mills during this period continued to come from the central and southwest Antioquian coffee zones, where La Violencia was least intense, and Liberal supporters were not barred from jobs. Led by the Echeverrías and ANDI, the Medellín elite consciously promoted an image of the city as an 'oasis' of peaceful capitalist productivity, beneficial to the nation, thanks to the social responsibility of its major industrialists. They gave full backing to the power-sharing deal known as the National Front Accord that was sealed between the two ruling-class parties, Liberal and Conservative, in 1957.

Yet the limits of the Antioquian model were all too apparent. Each sector—textiles, cigarettes, beer, chocolates—remained subject to a family monopoly, and manufacturing never developed from light consumer goods into heavy goods and machinery. Capital investment was ultimately dependent on coffee remittances, recycled as subsidies for industry through the state's national-development fund. Any trickle-down wealth effect remained very restricted, barely percolating beyond the upper layers of the textile employees when it came to turning workers into consumers. Once coffee prices entered the long decline of the 1960s and 70s, and far-eastern economies—Taiwan, Hong Kong—became unbeatably competitive in terms of cheap clothing and light consumer goods, Medellín's days as a capitalist paradise were numbered.

At the same time, subdivision of inherited peasant plots, combined with population growth and a secular decline in coffee prices, contributed to worsening poverty in the countryside. The numbers streaming into the city in search of work increased from the mid-60s. Squatter

<sup>6</sup> For a fuller analysis, see my 'An Evil Hour', NLR 23, September–October 2003.

<sup>7</sup> See Mary Roldán, *Blood and Fire: La Violencia in Antioquia, 1946–53*, Durham, NC 2003.

neighbourhoods sprouted up the green hillsides on either side of the Medellín River, especially in the northern Aburrá Valley: warrens of hand-built dwellings constructed from cheap brick, wood, cinder blocks or *bareque*, interconnected by steep flights of steps. Their expansion was guaranteed by the elite's stubborn blocking of agrarian reform. Within a few decades these fast-growing slums would house half the city's 2.2 million population. Meagre state resources were funnelled through neighbourhood committees, the Juntas de Acción Comunal. But the fact that police and army units were sent in to demolish hillside settlements was a symptom of the crisis of authority on the city's new frontiers.

Meanwhile, as industrial employment stagnated, a burgeoning layer of lower-middle and working-class urban youth faced a jobless future; a larger public university system helped produce a new middle-class layer with higher education but lacking any prospects of professional security.<sup>8</sup> The hopes raised by the expanding manufacturing economy of the postwar decades, for social mobility and improved housing, education, health and working conditions, were dashed for the succeeding generations by the crisis of the *antioqueño* model. As Medellín's new *barrios* organized and petitioned to obtain public services in the 1970s, a young, jobless proletariat added an insurgent edge to the mobilizations. Rural guerrillas had been a permanent feature of the Colombian political landscape since the 1950s, remnants of a marginalized but resilient and deep-rooted left; by the 1960s these were chiefly constituted in the FARC (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia) and ELN (Ejército de Liberación Nacional). By the late 1970s a broader urban left was becoming visible, as worker, student and guerrilla networks began to converge. It was met with savage repression by state forces—trade unionists and left-wing community leaders were detained, beaten or killed. The bipartisan National Front accords functioned to exclude left forces from official political representation. By 1970, voter turnout had dropped to 20 per cent. Popular protest increasingly took the form of radical insurrectionism, aiming at the overthrow of the failed social model. ,

### *Rise of narco-capital*

Among the most dynamic of the forces that would contest that model's replacement in Medellín over the next two decades was the 'rising class'

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<sup>8</sup> Marco Palacios, *Entre la legitimidad y la violencia. Colombia, 1875-1994*, Bogotá 1995, p. 298.

of traffickers and import-export men, bred by the informal economy. Smuggling cheap goods—clothing, cigarettes—from the duty-free zone of Panama to beat high import tariffs would prove a lucrative alternative to domestic production and an effective means of money laundering. Growing up in an undistinguished Medellín suburb, Pablo Escobar, son of a peasant farmer and a school-teacher mother, was dabbling in contraband activities from an early age. He cut his teeth as a young thug in the ‘Marlboro Wars’ of the early 1970s, as rival gangs fought over the contraband cigarette trade. This group established the various interlocking networks of the coca trade—purchase, processing, credit lines, transportation—that would become known as the Medellín Cartel, and whose long tentacles linked the coffee heartlands to eastern tropical frontiers and the northern Atlantic coast.<sup>9</sup> Escobar and others helped finance infrastructural projects, including roads and airports, to facilitate the development of the new industry.

The glitzy tastes and brazen violence of this new-rich *clase emergente* were in dramatic contrast to the penny-pinching piety and conservatism of Medellín’s traditional oligarchs. Of the city’s ruling families, initially only the Ochoas, under the patriarchal leadership of El Gordo, the Fat One, bridged the gulf between old money and new. Land deals were the preferred method of laundering the truckloads of narco-dollars. Escobar and others bought up vast tracts of impoverished cattle country in the tropical lowlands of northern Antioquia and the Magdalena Medio Valley, where land values were low as ranchers fled the threat of FARC kidnapping and extortion. The father of the current President of Colombia, Alberto Uribe Sierra, a poor relation of the Ochoas, was a key intermediary in these real-estate transactions, and soon became a major ranch-owner himself. As cocaine money helped fuel a real-estate and construction boom in which local capital, freed from industrial development, could make more lucrative investments, the economic and political clout of the cartel was bolstered by a broader alliance with the old oligarchy.

Helicoptering in to their new domains, Medellín’s narco-barons and their entourages found themselves prey to kidnapping and extortion by the local guerrillas. Their response was to recruit their own private armies and death squads, as well as agitating for stepped-up state-level

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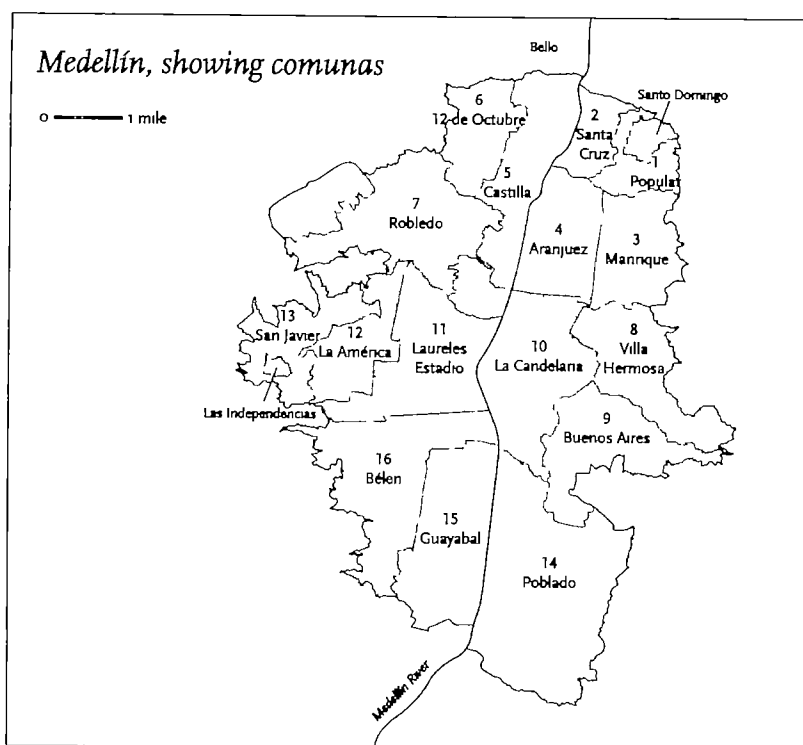
<sup>9</sup> German Castro Caycedo, *En Secreto*, Bogotá 1996, pp 283–4.



counter-insurgency policies. In 1981 Escobar and other traffickers joined with army officers, police and party bosses to organize MAS (Death to Kidnappers). They also turned their hired killers against FARC supporters and other leftists in Medellín itself, plunging the city into a murderous downward spiral. The narco elite would impose its own solution to the social crisis of Medellín, at a terrible price. Narcocapital would be the bridge from the industrial model to the 'new economy' makeover, based on finance, real estate and services—though Escobar would have to be sacrificed in the process.

The rise of the *contrabandistas* to political influence in Medellín—and in the country as a whole—did not go unopposed. The early career of President Uribe is instructive in this regard. Although he boasts a management diploma from Harvard, acquired in 1993, the 18-year-old Uribe passed out of Medellín's Jorge Robledo high school in 1970 with 'special exemption' from the final examinations. As his father's income swelled through land deals, Uribe Junior was fast-tracked through the municipal-authority structures: he became head of the real-estate office of Medellín's Public Works Department in 1976, at the age of 24. After stints at the Labour Ministry and the Department of Civil Aviation—where he was responsible for allocating pilots' licences for the fleet of planes operated by Escobar—Uribe was ushered in as Mayor of Medellín in 1982, as quid pro quo for his father's contributions to Belisario Betancur's presidential campaign. But this proved unacceptable to some of Antioquia's traditional politicians. After five months, Uribe—who would openly avail himself of Escobar's organization when his father was killed, allegedly by the FARC, in 1983—was removed from the mayor's office.

Escobar, who had made political enemies through his populist posturing, was drummed out of the Liberal Party in 1982 by those denouncing the influence of narco-traffickers in the halls of power. Many backed the US DEA's demand for his extradition. Escobar's death squads responded with bombings and assassinations of pro-extraditionists: journalists, university teachers, human-rights activists. Under his influence, the involution of Medellín's working-class neighbourhoods took a new turn: organized crime tied to narcotics production and distribution provided a jobs machine for young proletarians without prospects of education or waged work, offering unheard-of opportunities for social mobility through an updated version of the values that underwrote Catholic corporatism.



Local gangs involved in auto theft, drug dealing and extortion—the Priscos in Aranjuez, La Ramada in Bello, Quika's crew in Castilla—became integrated into the networks that revolved around Pablo Escobar and the Medellín Cartel. By putting semi-criminal youth to work *en masse*, Escobar contributed enormously to the specialization and professionalization of Medellín gangs, perhaps his most enduring legacy. Though there had been gangs in the city since the 1960s, their activities had never impinged directly on everyday life. Now they put a brake on processes of community self-organization—for housing, health care, education and better employment—making many of the hillside neighbourhoods all but unliveable. Civic participation was reduced to patronage for those who could afford it, and grief and fear for the rest.

### *Armies of the left*

In a parallel development, the mid-1980s saw the formation of independent *milicias populares*—‘popular militias’—initially under the

supervision of left community activists and former guerrilla leaders. United by a broadly left-insurrectionary outlook, they aimed to root out gangs and crime from their neighbourhoods through force of arms, and institute their own form of self-government. Squatters in the north-eastern *comunas* worked with ex-guerrilla forces and M-19 militants to organize a self-defence militia known as Los Capuchos, the 'masked ones', from 1985. Other left militias emerged in neighbouring territory. The negotiations initiated with the rural guerrilla forces by the Betancur government in the early 1980s had allowed for the establishment of safe-haven 'peace camps', which played an important role in educating and training the popular militias. Building on pre-existing, yet loose and shape-shifting youth gang structures, the ELN in the northeast and the FARC in Comuna 13 and other western districts endeavoured to re-tool them for armed insurgency.<sup>10</sup> Before the state intervened against them, popular militias succeeded in defeating small and medium-sized criminal gangs. Militias were dedicated, at least in theory, to community empowerment, and their activities included improvement projects such as clean-up, paving, painting, sports and recreation, as well as night patrols and the resolution of domestic and neighbourly disputes.

The mid-80s also saw the formation of a new broad-left alliance, the Unión Patriótica, a joint project of the FARC and the Colombian Communist Party, which for a while served as a clearing-house for urban radicals of all ideological stripes. Though not as strong in Medellín as elsewhere, the UP offered the hope of a concerted resistance against both the old oligarchy and the new gangster class. But by organizing in the open, it also exposed its supporters to violent repression by the right. In Antioquia as elsewhere, students, teachers, journalists, lawyers, and especially trade unionists and peasant activists associated with the alliance were subject to assassination. The UP was destroyed not as a result of internal failings, real as these were, but because it could not withstand the sustained right-wing terror directed against it.

The immediate outcome of this repression was to strengthen the armed groupings of the left. Responding to the deteriorating political

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<sup>10</sup> Ramiro Ceballos Melguizo, 'The Evolution of Armed Conflict in Medellín: An Analysis of Major Actors', *Latin American Perspectives*, issue 116, vol. 28, no. 1, p. 113. Interviews with lawyers, journalists, community activists, and former militia leaders, Medellín, Colombia, 2000–02. See also, William Estrada and Adriana Gómez, eds, *Somos historia: Comuna nororiental*, Medellín, n.d., pp. 65–88, 106–7, 128–33, Alonso Salazar, *No nacimos pa' semilla*, Bogotá 1990, pp. 86–7.

and security situation, the growth of popular militias accelerated in the late 1980s; many of their commanders enjoyed popular support and legitimacy.<sup>11</sup> If former governor Gilberto Echeverry's fear of a communist takeover of the city, expressed in a letter to Liberal President César Gaviria, seems comically exaggerated—especially in light of global shifts then unfolding—the spread of micro-sovereignities, exercised in the name of 'the people', was real.<sup>12</sup>

Yet in the context of the overall balance of power, the provisional victories of popular militias against the smaller gangs could only give rise to more violent, professional criminal groupings with closer ties to narco-trafficking and, *ipso facto*, elements within the state-security agencies. For Escobar's networks, war with the left militias served as a laboratory for gang mutation towards concentration, centralization and fusion with the most authoritarian elements of the state. Under siege, the left militias now began to reproduce the authoritarian state and gangster practices against which they had organized themselves. This was an evolution comparable—*mutatis mutandis*—to that of ETA elements in the Basque Country or Provos in Northern Ireland. Ultimately, the armed urban left would be undermined not only due to state repression and growing gangster terror, but also because it lacked the political resources to combat those tendencies within its own ranks.<sup>13</sup>

At the end of the 1980s, a broad alliance of state-led forces, including many of his former Medellín associates, turned against Escobar himself. The catalyst was the 1989 assassination of the likely Liberal presidential candidate, Luis Carlos Galán, who had publicly called for Escobar's extradition to the US. On President Barco's initiative, a special Bloque de Búsqueda, a task force composed of elite police units from outside the city—natives were considered unreliable—was set up to search for Escobar. For his part, Escobar hired a veritable army from the northeastern and northwestern Medellín *comunas* to wage war against the state. The price for a dead police officer in December 1989 was 500,000 pesos (\$250); by 1991 it had tripled.<sup>14</sup> Around 500 policemen were assassinated in Medellín in 1990–91, and Escobar's minions set off some 150 car

<sup>11</sup> Mary Roldán, 'Cocaine and the "Miracle" of Modernity in Medellín', in Paul Gootenberg, ed., *Cocaine: Global Histories*, London 1999, pp. 165–83.

<sup>12</sup> Cited in Ana Jaramillo, et al., *En la encrucijada: Conflicto y cultura política en los noventa*, Medellín 1998, p. 65, note 9.

<sup>13</sup> Interviews with militia members, Medellín, June 1999, May 2000, July 2002.

<sup>14</sup> Interview with former members of La Ramada, Medellín, May 2000.

bombs. Once Escobar had negotiated the terms of his surrender with the Gaviria government in July 1991—he would be jailed in a palatial ‘prison’ of his own construction, staffed by his own guards—Colombian military, police and intelligence agencies led a ferocious wave of repression against *comuna* dwellers: twenty to forty young men were found dead each weekend.<sup>15</sup> By 1992 Escobar had ‘escaped’ and was at war with the government again; for the second consecutive year, there were more than 6,000 homicides in Medellín.

Under renewed pressure from Washington, the Gaviria Administration and US agencies now forged an alliance with the Cali cartel and, crucially, Escobar’s former associates in the Medellín Cartel that came to be known as Los Pepes, ‘Those Persecuted by Pablo Escobar’. Throughout 1993 Carlos Castaño, a narco-paramilitary chieftain and former Escobar employee, led the campaign against his ex-boss, using hit squads composed of gang youths from Medellín. The homicide rate that year was a terrifying 311 per 100,000, nearly 10 times higher than today. Castaño went after Escobar’s gangs and associates, but also targeted his primordial enemies: ‘communist subversives’.<sup>16</sup> An ally in this pursuit was Diego Fernando Murillo, known as Don Berna, head of security for one of Escobar’s lieutenants before turning to coordinate hit squads against the *capo di tutti capi*. Escobar was finally killed in December 1993.

### *From the Governor’s mansion*

Escobar’s death signalled, not the end of narcocapital’s influence in Medellín, but its coming of age. By 1995, the influence of the *clase emergente* was apparent at three different levels. First, the links forged through Los Pepes had strengthened the ties between state-security organs, narco-paramilitaries and Medellín’s gangs. Second, cocaine capital laundered through real estate, construction and finance, had now captured the state government of Antioquia, in the person of Álvaro Uribe. After serving as a Medellín city councillor in the mid-80s, Uribe had been a state senator from 1986 to 1994, and in 1995 was elected governor. Together with his consigliere, Juan Moreno Villa—later named by the DEA for his suspiciously large potassium permanganate imports—Uribe now moved to bind the paramilitary forces of the cocaine industry

<sup>15</sup> Roldán, ‘Cocaine and the “Miracle” of Modernity’, p. 175.

<sup>16</sup> Alonso Salazar, *La Parábola de Pablo*, Bogotá 2002, pp 307–14. Castaño was the founder of ACCU (Peasant Self-Defence Forces of Córdoba and Urabá), a paramilitary network that aimed to re-capture FARC territory.

into Colombia's state-security system. The mechanism for this was the Defence Ministry's new *Convivir* structure, which gave government backing to local 'security and vigilance' units grouped alongside Colombia's military and police. Financed by private enterprise but, with Uribe in the Governor's mansion, operating with 'the support and legal sanction of the state', these heavily armed death squads enjoyed near-total impunity; killings of human-rights activists and labour leaders duly accelerated.<sup>17</sup> In Antioquia and Córdoba, the *Convivir* were largely co-extensive with Castaño's ACCU paramilitaries. Seven *Convivir* units functioned in Medellín alone.<sup>18</sup>

A third development helped to cement the new order at street level from the mid-90s. Don Berna had inherited the 'Envigado Office' of specialist killers after Escobar's death.<sup>19</sup> He now moved to establish a gang of gangs known as La Terraza, based in Manrique, one of the northeastern *comunas*' toughest neighbourhoods. La Terraza soon controlled a substantial portion of organized crime in the city—contract killing, armed robbery, extortion, gambling, prostitution, retail drug sales—as well as coordinating cocaine exports through Urabá, building on the connection Don Berna had established with Carlos Castaño in the days of Los Pepes. Gang leaders now negotiated formal arrangements with Medellín's municipal government through the newly created 'Office of Peace and Co-existence.' For many, this simply meant joining the *Convivir*. The resulting alliance between Don Berna and Castaño constituted a near monopoly of violence. Don Berna's thugs were organized into the Bloque Cacique Nutibara; Castaño's, under local commander 'Rodrigo 00' (Doble Cero)—another veteran of Los Pepes—into the Bloque Metro. Making offers that local gang leaders could not refuse, the two groups had conquered 70 per cent of the city by 2002. Gangs that tried to hold out were either forced to pay tribute or disappeared altogether.

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<sup>17</sup> Roldán, 'Cocaine and the "Miracle" of Modernity', p. 178. See also Joseph Contreras, *Biografía no autorizada de Álvaro Uribe Vélez: El señor de las sombras*, Bogotá 2002, pp. 120–46.

<sup>18</sup> Astrid Mireya Téllez Ardilla, *Milicias Populares. Otra expresión de la violencia social en Colombia*, Bogotá 1995, p. 107. See also Fernando Cubides, 'From Private to Public Violence: The Paramilitaries', and Gonzalo Sánchez, 'Introduction: Problems of Violence, Prospects for Peace', both in Charles Bergquist et al., eds, *Violence in Colombia, 1990–2000: Waging War and Negotiating Peace*, Wilmington, DE 2001, pp. 131, 11.

<sup>19</sup> Though this network of assassins no longer officially exists, interviews with traffickers in Medellín in December 2004, April and August 2005, and June 2006, revealed business as usual.

Nevertheless, well-armed leftist militias continued to control substantial redoubts in the slums of the northeast and west of Medellín.<sup>20</sup> Comuna 13 remained an unbreachable stronghold. In May 2002, after the Mayor and his entourage were repelled by gunfire, state forces launched a military offensive codenamed Operation Mariscal on Comuna 13; the troops withdrew after intensive house-to-house fighting failed to break the militias. Following Uribe's election as President, however, further massive assaults were launched. In late 2002 and early 2003, the Army's Operations Orión and Estrella VI against Comuna 13 were, it seemed, coordinated with BM and BCN paramilitaries, who remained behind to occupy the conquered territories. By the end of 2003, Don Berna had taken over the city's gangs, and with the help of his network in state-security agencies, vanquished the last of the remaining militias, along with Bloque Metro, which had become a liability; the BCN killed Doble Cero in May 2004.<sup>21</sup> A new order had been established in Medellín.

### *Cocaine and the new economy*

In *Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, Barrington Moore famously described European feudalism as 'gangsterism that had become society itself'. Don Berna's trajectory from hired gun to mafia don to 'pacifier' of Medellín epitomizes the re-feudalization of power in Colombia's neo-liberalized economy, underwritten by cocaine profits as the former, industrial model was based on coffee. This fusion of politics, property and organized crime, reflected in the paramilitary grip over security for capital investment, links the city's bad old days to its good new ones, and largely determines the present and future shape of the built environment. Following Don Berna's victory, homicide and violent-crime rates fell precipitously, even as the city's first mass graves for the uncounted dead were uncovered in the central-west and northeast. In the late 1990s, publicly sanctioned security forces 'cleansed'—*limpiaron*—a large area of the

<sup>20</sup> In 1994 some 800 militias—not aligned to the FARC or ELN—agreed an accord with the Gaviria government, in which the former militia leaders were recognized as security chiefs in their own neighbourhoods, within a structure known as Coosercom. FARC and ELN-linked militias in the city then united to occupy the demobilized territory, killing several hundred Coosercom members. In 1996, the government moved to dissolve Coosercom itself, on the grounds of its gangsterish behaviour. Despite this poor record, the same 'peace process' was attempted with the criminal gangs. See Sánchez, 'Introduction', Bergquist et al., eds, *Violence in Colombia*, p. 11.

<sup>21</sup> Adam Isacson, 'Plan Colombia: Six Years Later', Centre for International Policy, November 2006.

city centre, dominated by a red-light district and open-air market on the north side and a street of gay salons to the west. Hired thugs threatened, displaced or murdered the district's 'disposable' inhabitants—drug sellers, addicts, prostitutes, street kids, petty thieves, called *desechables*—to make it safe for urban redevelopment. After 2000, this city-wide 'pacification' campaign was supported by state-security forces, businessmen, politicians of both parties and the Catholic Church.

'Pacification' is the condition of possibility for the much-touted improvements in tourism, investment and security. Taking the credit for it, Don Berna explained that his troops understood the need to create the 'necessary climate so that investment returns, particularly foreign investment, which is fundamental if we do not want to be left behind by the engine of globalization'.<sup>22</sup> While continuing to manage extortion, contract killing, gambling, drug sales, etc., Don Berna has also had an important hand in construction, transport, wholesale and retail, finance, fashion, private security, real-estate development and cable television. In the 2004 elections, thirty of Don Berna's candidates won posts as heads of neighbourhood associations, the Juntas de Acción Comunal. They ran through an NGO called Corporación Democracia, led by Giovanni Marín, alias 'Comandante R', a butcher turned ideologue who ran for Congress in 2006. According to Marín, 'My conscience is clear. People should know that we collaborated in pacifying the city; that we handed over a city at peace.'<sup>23</sup>

Don Berna's pacification process coincided with the landslide election victory of Mayor Sergio Fajardo in 2003. Superficially, the contrast between the *modus operandi* of the two could hardly be sharper. Fajardo is US-educated (a doctoral thesis in mathematics from the University of Wisconsin–Madison), a jeans-wearing newspaper columnist and media personality of the centre-left, untarnished by identification with either of Colombia's political parties. Support for him is strongest amongst the middle class, but is astonishingly high—around 90 per cent, compared to President Uribe's estimated 70 per cent. His boosters like to point to Fajardo's relative lack of corruption: accounting processes are transparent, budgeting participatory. This needs some qualification: Fajardo's family owns one of Colombia's largest construction and cement firms,

<sup>22</sup> Quoted in Amnesty International, 'The Paramilitaries in Medellín: Demobilization or Legalization?', September 2005, p. 35: [www.amnesty.org](http://www.amnesty.org).

<sup>23</sup> Quoted in Javier Sulé, 'Medellín Orgullosa', *El País* (Madrid), May 2006.



which is allegedly benefiting from non-competitive contracts to build luxury housing in El Poblado, the city's wealthiest neighbourhood.

Fajardo is also undertaking a programme of showpiece public works, many aimed at the hillside slums where the state has either been absent, or manifest only as a heavy fist. An ambitious project called 'Medellín, the most educated' will involve the construction of six public park and library complexes in areas like the northeastern and western *comunas*, to go along with ten new schools that will serve 20,000 students, at a total cost of \$1.6bn. As the map of schools and parks-libraries demonstrates, for the first time city government is establishing a non-repressive presence in *comunas* long disputed by gangs, militias and narco-paramilitaries. Yet the library complex in Las Independencias, in the west, looks like a prison: composed of six two-storey sections joined by stairs, long black metal bars separate large windows on the front of each barracks-grey block. The library in Santo Domingo, in the northeast, is to sit on the other side of a high wall from the neighbourhood's houses. Composed of two black pod-like structures, it looks like a military research installation. This is the classic architecture of pacification, with security functions built into design.<sup>24</sup>



*Artist's rendition of the proposed library in Santo Domingo, Medellín*

<sup>24</sup> Mike Davis, *City of Quartz*, New York 1990, pp. 228, 240, 256–57.

The chief political aim of the narco-paramilitaries has long been negotiated demobilization—'going legit', with immunity from extradition to the US. Uribe had long looked kindly on this, and accords were agreed in 2005. Thoughtlessly, perhaps, Don Berna's boys killed a local politician campaigning just a few miles away from where their boss was shaking hands with the President's representative. After protests Don Berna was arrested for the killing, but continues to exercise formidable control from jail. The Medellín municipal government offers demobilizing paramilitaries the best terms in the country, plus job-skills training, etc; another coincidence of agendas between City Hall and Don Berna's Itagüí prison cell. By 2006, close to 4,000 demobilized paramilitaries had flocked to the city. But the major area of agreement between the two agents of Medellín's makeover remains the necessity of adapting the city to the needs and security of foreign capital. Don Berna's concern to create a favourable climate for overseas investors has already been noted; Fajardo echoes the need to 'project' the image of a 'vibrant city, once again taking its place as a business hub and tourist destination'.<sup>25</sup>

### *Andean paradigm?*

For over half a century, its exceptional modernity made Medellín an exemplar for national development far beyond Colombia's borders; a 'capitalist paradise' of the Cold War. The city appears ready to assume the role once more. Four years ago I suggested in these pages that, when Medellín's native son and Antioquia's former governor Álvaro Uribe was inaugurated as President of Colombia, the outlaws became the establishment. Medellín's model of a dynamic, narcotics-based, finance and service-sector economy—its slums now gilded with the occasional show-piece project—has become Colombia's.

After three generations of cocaine-fuelled urban warfare, Medellín is now positioned to become the leading edge of economic integration with the US, by linking the coffee axis of the Andean interior to the Pacific and Atlantic coasts. Since 1990, Antioquia has been planned as 'the best corner of America' for large-scale capital investment in mining, transport infrastructure, mega-projects like dams and canals, hardwood logging and palm plantations. Regional elites appear close to achieving their dream, first expressed during the coffee-export boom more than a century ago, to integrate their highland capital with the lowlands of the

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<sup>25</sup> Quoted in *El Colombiano*, 20 August 2005.

Caribbean and Pacific littorals, against the backdrop of American free-trade projects for the hemisphere.<sup>26</sup>

Yet if the region's ruling class has overcome its qualms in turning to narco-capital and paramilitaries to secure investment, property rights and profitability, such a basis provides little grounds for the new order's legitimacy. Though paramilitary chiefs have done well from Uribe's demobilization programme, the foot soldiers have found themselves returned to the bleak social conditions they had sought to escape. More than half of Medellín's population lives in poverty; three-quarters of those in the slum *comunas* earn less than the minimum wage; nearly half a million lack basic services—water, sewage, electricity. Disgruntled paramilitaries, considering themselves short-changed by Uribe's demobilization initiatives, may be willing to talk about their dealings with generals, politicians and business leaders. At the end of 2006 the Congressional opposition led by the Polo Democrático Alternativo sparked a Supreme Court investigation into alleged rigging of regional elections by Uribe's allies, with paramilitary collusion. Eight legislators have been detained, along with Uribe's former intelligence chief Jorge Noguera. In late March 2007 a CIA operative leaked documents to the *Los Angeles Times* showing that Colombia's Army chief, Gen. Mario Monoya, who commanded the 2002 Operation Orión assault on the slums of Medellín's Comuna 13, had signed an accord with one of Don Berna's henchmen and a local police commander on the joint planning and implementation of the offensive, which had left at least 14 dead and dozens more 'missing'.<sup>27</sup> At the time of writing, 'Para-gate' is still unravelling, coming ever closer to Uribe himself. The beacon of neo-conservatism in Latin America sheds a noxious glare, a reminder that Medellín's makeover rests on the graves of tens of thousands of its citizens. Resistance, and not only of the armed variety, has been formidable, which explains the *sangre y fuego*—blood and fire—expended to overcome it.

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<sup>26</sup> James Parsons, *Antioquia's Corridor to the Sea: An Historical Geography of the Settlement of Urabá*, Berkeley 1967.

<sup>27</sup> 'Colombia army chief linked to outlaw militias', *LA Times*, 25 March 2007. See also 'Colombian rebels threaten to expose political links', *Financial Times*, 1 March 2007.

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PETER WOLLEN

## ON GAZE THEORY

ALEXANDRE KOJÈVE WAS born in Russia into a well-to-do family; he was the nephew of the painter Kandinsky.<sup>1</sup> In 1920, at the age of eighteen, he left Moscow in order to study in Germany, first in Berlin and then in Heidelberg. In 1926 he moved on to Paris, registering as a student at the École Pratique des Hautes Études, where he attended a course on Hegel's religious philosophy given by a fellow-Russian, Alexandre Koyre, whom Kojève had previously met in Heidelberg. In 1932, Koyre repeated the course, which Kojève once again attended, and then, at the end of the academic year, Koyre quit Paris for the University of Cairo. Before he went, however, he asked Kojève to take over as leader of the Hegel seminar and Kojève agreed, teaching it consecutively for the next seven years, up until 1939. Among those who attended during this period were Georges Bataille, André Breton, Raymond Queneau, Jacques Lacan and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Kojève's seminar on Hegel, particularly his interpretative reading of passages from *Phenomenology of Spirit*, was to have a startling effect on French intellectual life. Kojève is best known today for his presentation of the Hegelian idea of the 'End of History', given fresh prominence by Francis Fukuyama's 1992 book on *The End of History and the Last Man*. Here, however, I want to concentrate specifically on Kojève's interpretation of Hegel's theory of the gaze and the master-slave dialectic.

Hegel wrote *Phenomenology of Spirit* in 1806 just as Napoleon approached Jena, where the great philosopher taught at the University. He completed his text on the very same day that the cannon began to sound, outside the city walls. Jena was the site of Napoleon's historic victory over Prussia, leading soon afterwards to his triumphal entry into Berlin and his establishment of French hegemony over the continent of Europe. For Hegel—and for Kojève—the timing was symbolic, the coincidence of the cannon's roar and the pen laid down. The year 1806 saw a turning

point not only in world history—Napoleon's accomplishment of the first crucial stage in the generalization of a new system of law and a new type of state, based on the concept of the citizen rather than the subject—but also in the history of philosophy. Now, for the first time, Hegel conceptualized the world as a historic rather than a natural totality, one which could only be understood in terms of an intersubjective process of change driven by humans themselves, rather than as a ready-made entity presented objectively to humans as a given. At Jena in 1806, Hegel himself believed, the instrument of world history—Napoleon—coincided with its philosopher—Hegel; deed with thought, action with understanding.

The foundation of Hegel's *Phenomenology* was his theory of the human gaze. Summarizing Kojève summarizing Hegel, it could be put like this: the human being is self-conscious, conscious of himself, of his human reality and dignity; and it is thus that he is essentially different from animals, which simply have a feeling or sentiment of selfhood. Man, Hegel believed, becomes conscious of himself at the moment when—for the 'first' time—he says 'I'. To understand man by understanding his 'origin' is, therefore, to understand the origin of the 'I' revealed by speech. For it is desire which brings the human, absorbed by the external object, back to himself: the (conscious) desire of a being is what constitutes that being as 'I', and which reveals itself as such by moving it to say: 'I . . . '.

Human desire, however, as opposed to animal desire, only becomes truly human when it is directed towards another desire, rather than simply towards an object. Thus, as Kojève puts it, interpreting Hegel:

In the relationship between man and woman, for example, desire is human only if the one desires, not the body, but the desire of the other . . . that is to say, if he wants to be 'desired' or 'loved' or, rather, 'recognized' in his human value, in his reality as a human individual. Likewise desire directed toward a natural object is human only to the extent that it is 'mediated' by the desire of another directed towards the same object; it is human to desire what others desire, because they desire it. Thus, an object perfectly useless from the biological point of view (such as a medal or the enemy's flag) can be desired because it is the object of other desires. Such a desire can only be a human desire, and human reality, as distinguished from animal reality, is created only by action that satisfies such desires: human history is the history of desired desires.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This text was originally presented to the Film Theory seminar at UCLA in 1998.

<sup>2</sup> Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*, [1947], New York 1969, p. 6.

In the beginning, then, desire is always competitive. In the last analysis it implies the possibility of struggle and, inevitably, the risk of death, as occurs in war. At the same time it is based on the desire for recognition by the other, the desire for seeing that what one is, or has, is what is desired by others; that it is of value to them. The origin of self-consciousness is thus bound up, from the beginning, not only with the desire for recognition, but with the risk which that entails. It is this line of thought which leads Hegel, as Kojève interprets him, to seeing the dialectic of the master and the slave as the motor of human history—as the slave desires to occupy the place of the master and the master desires the recognition of his mastery from the slave. It is this struggle between the master and the slave whose end is signalled by the battle of Jena, as Napoleon brings with him the doctrine of equality under the law and the general recognition of all by all, under that abstraction; an outcome made possible by the fusion of the servile labour (expected from the peasant) with the aristocratic mastery (enjoyed by the lord) in the bourgeois citizen: the self-sufficient worker who has mastery over himself. Kojève's own contribution to Hegel's theory was to consider the struggle of master and slave as being still unfinished, despite Napoleon's victory at Jena and Hegel's understanding of its world-historical import, because the end of history was now delayed by the new phase of struggle which in fact ensued as feudalism gave way to bourgeois democracy—that between capital and labour. The end of history, in Kojève's view, was still to come.

### *The child in the mirror*

Be that as it may, the feature of Hegel's thought which concerns us here, as transmitted by Kojève, is the significance he gives both to the gaze and to the return of the gaze, in recognition of the desire of the other. Those familiar with the work of Jacques Lacan will recognize immediately the crucial role played by Kojève in the development of his thought. Lacan put together Henri Wallon's psychological research into child development with Kojève's Hegelian theory of the gaze as the motor of human history to produce his own theories of the mirror phase and of the dialectic of gaze and desire. For Lacan's biographer, Elisabeth Roudinesco, Kojève was the mysterious guru who, once gazed upon by Lacan, served as a model both for Lacan's own assumption of the guru's role—complete with transcription and publication of his oral commentary by his listeners—and also for the development of his elaborate theories of the gaze in relation to desire, which proved central to his whole project

and which would eventually leave their mark on film theory. The key text in this regard was Lacan's 'The Mirror Stage as formative of the function of *I*', an earlier paper which he revised in 1949 for the Zurich Conference of the International Psychoanalytic Association. Here Lacan noted that:

this moment in which the mirror-stage comes to an end inaugurates, by the identification with the *imago* of the counterpart and the drama of primordial jealousy . . . the dialectic that will henceforth link the 'I' to socially elaborated situations. It is this moment that decisively tips the whole of human knowledge into mediatization through the desire of the other, constitutes its objects into an abstract equivalence by the co-operation of others and turns the 'I' into that apparatus for which instinctual thrust constitutes a danger.

Lacan then goes on speak of the 'death instincts' and the 'alienating function of the 'I', the aggressivity it releases in any relation to the other, even in a relation involving the most Samaritan of aid.'<sup>3</sup> All of Kojève's ingredients are implicit here—the formative role played by the desire of others in creating that desire which belongs to the subject, symbolized as an 'I'; the aggressivity and struggle to the death unleashed by the battle between the master and the slave; but given a new meaning through their re-contextualization within the field of child psychology. Rather than the whole of human history, we are now dealing with the development of the infant into the child and eventually into the adult. As in Hegel's account, the gaze plays a pivotal role, but Lacan is interested now not just in the development of the 'I' of the mirror phase, founded on an illusory self-recognition ('misrecognition' in Lacan's terms), but also in the development of what he calls the 'social I', whose own desires reflect the desires of others and, in so doing, plunge the subject into aggressive relationships with those others.

In this situation, the only way out for a subject trapped in the net of the Imaginary and its endlessly reduplicated gazes is through entry into the Symbolic—symbolic rather than imaginary, linguistic rather than iconic, arbitrary rather than mimetic—in effect into a revamped version of Freud's 'talking cure'. At the same time, Lacan pushes his distrust of the register of the visual towards what Martin Jay has described as the 'denigration of vision', an intellectual trend which Jay sees as characteristic of

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<sup>3</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, London 2001, pp. 6–7.



twentieth-century French thinkers in general as they reacted against the classical Cartesian tradition. Against Descartes' fundamental 'perspectivism', his belief that vision was rational and reliable because it depended on the geometrical laws of perspective, these thinkers preferred to conceive it as a field of illusion and misrecognition. This was particularly clear in the case of film theorists such as Christian Metz or Jean-Louis Baudry, who described the cinematic apparatus in quasi-Lacanian—and certainly iconophobic—terms, as a vehicle for narcissistic, fetishistic or voyeuristic pleasures. Moreover, this iconophobia has roots which go back much further than Lacan, who simply provided an intellectual schema that combined elements drawn from phenomenology, psychoanalysis and anthropology.<sup>4</sup>

### *Being and voyeurism*

It is instructive in this context to look also at Jean-Paul Sartre's attitude to the gaze, towards what Jay describes as 'the uncompromisingly relentless demonization of *le regard* throughout the long course of his remarkable career'.<sup>5</sup> According to one commentator, there are more than 7,000 references to the look scattered throughout Sartre's work. In his early novel, *La Nausée*, published in 1938, the hero Roquentin confronts the source of his existential nausea by staring at 'the meaningless thingness', in Jay's phrase, of the twisted black root of a chestnut tree: 'I did not simply *see* this black; sight is an abstract invention, an idea that has been cleaned up, simplified, one of man's ideas. That black there, amorphous, feeble presence, overflowed sight, smell and taste.'<sup>6</sup> It is as if a surge of primal nothingness, the source of Roquentin's nausea, overcomes the tidy world of vision, an illusory world of our own devising which serves simply to safeguard us against the horrifying thingness of things. Jay hazards a biographical explanation for the philosopher's intense iconophobia: Sartre was afflicted both by his own ugliness and by his short-sightedness. As Jay puts it, 'Sartre elevated his own experience as the victim of the look—or what he recalled as such—into something very much like a universal human condition.'<sup>7</sup> For Sartre, the look always objectified. The looker was active, aggressive, and the looked-at the victim of the gaze.

<sup>4</sup> Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The denigration of vision in twentieth-century French thought*, Berkeley, CA 1993.

<sup>5</sup> Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, p. 275.

<sup>6</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea*, [1938], London 2000, p. 187. Translation amended.

<sup>7</sup> Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, p. 287.

Sartre, like Lacan later, distinguished between the eye, a bodily organ, and the gaze, an action. 'It is never when eyes are looking at you that you can find them beautiful or ugly, that you can remark on their colour. The Other's look hides his eyes; it seems to *go in front of them*.' On the same page from *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre goes on to explain why the gaze is so disturbing: 'This is because to perceive is to *look at*, and to apprehend a look is not to apprehend a look-as-object in the world (unless the look is not directed upon us); it is to be conscious of *being looked at*.'<sup>8</sup> It is the one looked at who is objectified, reified, turned into a thing, while the look is the agent—the imaginary agent—of that objectification. We cannot see the look, but we can feel its force. In fact, the look prevents us from looking back into the eyes of the one who looks—all we can hope to do is, by looking back, to meet one gaze with another in a kind of battle of looks, until one or other of us is subjugated.

In another passage, Sartre describes a voyeur looking through a keyhole. It is a grippingly novelistic passage set in the middle of a great work of philosophy, designed to convey not simply the concept of 'being looked-at-ness', so to speak, but the very experience of being looked at.

Let us imagine that moved by jealousy, curiosity or vice I have just glued my ear to the door and looked through the keyhole. I am alone and on the level of a non-thetic self-consciousness

—that is to say, a consciousness of self which is implicit rather than explicit to the subject. Sartre continues:

This means first of all that there is no self to inhabit my consciousness, nothing therefore to which I can refer my acts in order to qualify them. They are in no way *known*; *I am my acts* and hence they carry in themselves their whole justification. I am a pure consciousness of things, and things, caught up in the circuit of my selfness, offer to me their potentialities as the proof of my non-thetic consciousness (of) my own possibilities. This means that behind that door a spectacle is presented as 'to be seen', a conversation as 'to be heard'. The door, the keyhole are at once both instruments and obstacles, they are presented as 'to be handled with care'; the keyhole is given as 'to be looked through close by and a little to one side' . . . No transcending view comes to confer upon my acts the character of a *given* on which a judgment can be brought to bear. My consciousness sticks to my acts, it is my acts; and my acts are commanded only by the ends to be obtained and by the instruments to be employed.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, [1943], London 2003, p. 282.

<sup>9</sup> Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, pp. 282–3.

In other words, I am conscious of my activity as a spy and an eavesdropper, but this activity, although carried out in relation to a door, a keyhole or a room, has no immediate object which causes me to reposition myself externally in relation to my activity; it is simply what I am currently doing. 'My attitude, for example, has no "outside"; it is a pure process of relating the instrument (the keyhole) to the end to be attained (the spectacle to be seen), a pure mode of losing myself in the world', Sartre writes. Then, after more reflections centred on the jealousy that has caused this figure to peep through the keyhole, on the simple affirmation that 'I am this jealousy' without contemplating it, there comes an unanticipated change in my 'situation':

All of a sudden I hear footsteps in the hall. Someone is looking at me! What does this mean? It means that I am suddenly affected in my being and that essential modifications appear in my structure—modifications which I can apprehend and fix conceptually by means of the reflective *cogito*. First of all, I now exist as *myself* for my unreflective consciousness. It is this irruption of the self which has been most often described: I see *myself* because *somebody* sees me—as it is usually expressed. This way of putting it is not wholly exact. But let us look at it more carefully. So long as we considered the for-itself in its isolation, we were able to maintain that the unreflective consciousness cannot be inhabited by a self; the self was given as an object only for the reflective consciousness.

In other words, reflective self-consciousness is created by my sense of objectification:

Only the reflective consciousness has the self directly for an object. The unreflective consciousness does not apprehend the *person* directly or as *its* object; the person is presented to consciousness *in so far as the person is an object for the Other*. This means that all of a sudden I am conscious of myself escaping myself . . . in that I have no foundation outside myself I am for myself only as I am a pure reference to the Other [to the one who looks at me].

Hence, shame:

the *recognition* of the fact that I *am* indeed that Object which the other is looking at and judging . . . as my freedom escapes me so as to become a given object . . . Shame reveals to me that I am this being . . . *in-itself*.<sup>10</sup>

I should point out that this account, somewhat abbreviated, occurs shortly after an exposition by Sartre of the same passage from Hegel on human desire that Kojève had explicated earlier. Rather than endorsing

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<sup>10</sup> Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, pp. 284–6.

Hegel, however, Sartre criticizes him, differentiating his own position from that of Hegel while maintaining many of its terms. Sartre accepts Hegel's contention that 'I am a being for-itself which is for-itself only through another', that 'I depend on the Other *in my being*.' But Sartre removes 'desire' from Hegel's system, substituting for it the central distinction, in his own system, of *being* as opposed to *knowledge* as the foundation of identity. In this respect Sartre's adaptation of Hegel differs markedly from that of Lacan, for whom, of course, desire is a central category and, by extension, lack, which desire seeks to fill. Thus desire, in the Lacanian schema, is inseparable from lack of being, and intersubjective relationships are always already determined by this lack; whereas for Sartre, the lack—the feeling of vulnerability, the apprehension that 'there is someone there', that 'I have a body that can be hurt'—is created by our awareness of the look of the other. While, in some respects, this aggressivity contained in the look could be reformulated in terms of the battle of the master and the slave, this is not the way Sartre approaches it. In his terms, the one looked at, the one made vulnerable, finds his identity draining away as he, or she, becomes merely an object for the other.

### *Suspense and spectatorship*

In this context, it might be useful to think of the situation represented in Hitchcock's *Rear Window* (1954), when the man suspected of murder who lives in the apartment opposite James Stewart's realizes that he is being looked at by Stewart and returns his gaze—an incident which leads, soon afterwards, to a Hegelian fight to the death. *Rear Window* is often referred to as a film about voyeurism, but we could equally well see it as a film about the look as an aggression leading to the response of counter-aggression, the first visual, the second physical. In this reading the look is always already embodied. Here it is interesting to recall that, rather than the potential aggressor, Sartre positions himself both as the wrong-doer and as the potential victim—caught in the act by the other. 'The Other is watching me', Sartre imagines:

If I see him ready for anything, his hand in his pocket where he has a weapon, his finger placed on the electric bell and ready 'at the slightest movement on my part' to call the police, I apprehend my possibilities from outside . . . The inclination to run away, which dominates me and carries me along and which I *am*—this I read in the Other's watchful look and in that other look—the gun pointed at me. The Other apprehends this inclination in me [to run away] in so far as he has anticipated it and is already

prepared for it. He apprehends it in me in so far as he surpasses it and disarms it. But I do not grasp the actual surpassing; I grasp simply the death of my possibility . . . My possibility of hiding in the corner becomes the fact that the Other can surpass it towards his possibility of pulling me out of concealment [into his gaze], of identifying me [recognizing me], of arresting me [destroying me]."<sup>11</sup>

What is striking about this passage is its cinematic quality, the alternating points of view, the creation of suspense, the temporalization of the look—as Sartre describes it, ‘The *Other’s* look in so far as I apprehend it comes to give to *my* time a new dimension’.<sup>12</sup> Put in another way, the gaze of the Other makes my present his present, shrinks my projected future, imposes his temporalization on mine. In fact, this is the classic Hitchcockian situation of suspense, now established as itself built on the foundation of the look—that look which, as Sartre argued, limits our possibilities of future action and thus our freedom, until we are finally trapped. So long as we are hidden, we are free; but once we are seen our freedom begins to bleed away. In the cinema, of course, the point-of-view shot is far from the norm, but the camera nonetheless allows us to see what the characters are doing as if we ourselves had complete mastery of the gaze and therefore of temporality, enjoying untrammelled visual access to the significant actions and situations of the characters; enjoying our own freedom both to look and to envisage future possibilities; looking in from outside and yet feeling with the characters their own lack of time or loss of freedom.

The question of who is looking and who is looked at is also the foundation of Laura Mulvey’s 1975 essay on ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’. Although based on Freudian rather than Hegelian theory, this deals with many of the same issues. In striking contrast to Sartre, Mulvey concentrates on the pleasure of looking, the enjoyment to be gained from mastery of the look, both as a spectator outside the film and through identification with the characters within it. Her basic postulate, almost a cliché by now, is that in American cinema, as a general rule, man is ‘bearer of the look’ and woman connotes ‘to-be-looked-at-ness’, a concept drawn from Roland Barthes’s analyses of the rhetoric of photography. In Mulvey’s text the battle between master and slave is reconceptualized as the split between male and female characters, now seen within a psychoanalytic framework. The male look, like that of the

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<sup>11</sup> Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, pp. 287–8. <sup>12</sup> Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 291.

master, is an aggressive, even sadistic, and certainly voyeuristic look. The female to-be-looked-at is like Sartre's victim, except eroticized rather than criminalized.

However, Mulvey never quite draws the Hegelian and Lacanian conclusion we might expect—that the desire of the male protagonist can only exist as a competitive desire whose real aim is to achieve value in the eyes of other males by obtaining for himself the object of their desire. She stays within the framework of the 'I' of the mirror phase, rather than that of the 'social I' which reflects the influence of Kojève on Lacan. The desire which dominates her account is the voyeuristic desire to look at the woman as an end in itself, rather than the desire to achieve value in the eyes of others by possession of the woman whom they too are seen as desiring. Of course, on another level, we might see the circulation of the concept of the 'gaze', from Hegel via Kojève and Lacan to Mulvey, as itself a struggle for intellectual possession of a concept which once belonged to another.

Mulvey's essay also draws from Lacan in its attack on ego psychology, arguing that 'the satisfaction and reinforcement of the ego that represent the high point of film history hitherto must be attacked', just as Lacan argued that American ego psychology must be attacked.<sup>13</sup> The crucial text was the 1936 version of Lacan's paper on 'The Mirror Stage', which assailed the idea that the ego was developmentally detached from the id to become, in Elisabeth Roudinesco's words, 'the instrument of the individual's adaptation to external reality . . . responsible for controlling the [instinctual] drives.' In attacking ego psychology, Roudinesco suggests, Lacan drew on his experience of Kojève's seminar with its questioning of the nature of the coherent subject.<sup>14</sup> Lacan argued that the self-image seen by the infant in the mirror provided a visual icon of an ideal ego which compensated the young child in fantasy for its actual lack of motor control and coherent sense of its own body. It thus created an illusory ideal identity which was both an identification with the other through recognition, in Kojève's sense, and, at the same time, a defence against the overwhelming insecurity caused by the drives and by the generally terrifying aspect of the surrounding world as presented to the child. After giving his paper at the 1936 International Psychoanalytical Congress in Marienbad, to a largely hostile audience, Lacan went to

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<sup>13</sup> In Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures*, London 1989.

the Olympic Games in Berlin, famously filmed by Leni Riefenstahl, which he described in the same terms as the mirror phase: that is, as an attempt to create a satisfying visual representation of bodily form as support for an ideal ego.

### *Structures of perception*

But although Mulvey's piece is explicitly Freudian and Lacanian in its derivation, it is also implicitly Hegelian or Kojévian, in that the dual relationship between male voyeur and female object of the gaze is clearly analogous to the Hegelian relationship between master and slave. In a similar way Frantz Fanon, in his classic *Black Skin, White Masks*, had drawn on psychoanalysis and *Phenomenology of Spirit* in order to theorize contemporary black liberation movements. In both cases, it is a dialectic of the look which must be escaped from and overturned. Mulvey's article also raises a series of other questions about the cinematic look which complicate her analysis. First and foremost there is the problem of specifying the similarities and differences between the spectator's look, the camera's look and the character's look. These three looks can also be superimposed or identified with each other. For instance, the identification of camera's look with spectator's look, as Mulvey notes, is fundamental to the cinema. But in the point-of-view shot, all three looks—those of camera, spectator and character—are superimposed. In fact, the structure of looks in the cinema is extremely complex. It may be helpful to tabulate some of the perceptual situations that arise, each of which has its own problematic.

First, *Lady In The Lake* (1947). In this film, Robert Montgomery showed everything from one character's point of view. When he is hit and knocked out, the camera loses focus. When he is entering a room, we see his hand reach out for the door handle. On the few occasions we can see his face, it is because he is looking into a mirror. Essentially the triple identification of camera, character and viewer is maintained throughout the entire film, rather than being limited to specific point-of-view shots. As has often been noted, however, the effect is not to create an identification with the protagonist but an uneasy sense of distance. The reason, of course, is that we share none of the character's feelings, thoughts or motivations but only his perceptions—we do not feel that we

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<sup>14</sup> Elisabeth Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan*, [1993], Cambridge 2005, p. III.

know who 'he' is and therefore we cannot identify with him as 'me'. In fact, it seems that it is only through the exterior look at a character that we can identify psychologically, through what Lacan called 'transitivity'; a subcategory perhaps of 'recognition'.

Next, *Man With A Movie Camera* (1929). Vertov's film was a summation of the 'Kino-Eye' movement he launched in the early years of the Soviet Union. At the beginning this was envisaged as a movement of amateur cinematographers recording the world around them—'cine-observers', Vertov called them. In this view, the camera was a 'witness', recording the passage of everyday life as the Soviet Union went through a period of cataclysmic change. In *Man With A Movie Camera*, however, the camera takes on a life of its own, stalking about robotically on its tripod, both literally and metaphorically 'animated'.

From early on, Vertov linked observation with editing. In fact, his first category of editing was 'editing during observation', which he glossed as 'orienting the unaided eye at any place, at any time'. That is to say, the film-maker reconnoitred before filming, observing carefully the world around him. The film-maker then 'mentally organized what he had seen', before continuing to the third category, 'editing during filming'. This involved 'orienting the aided eye of the movie camera in the place inspected in step 1. Adjusting for the somewhat changed conditions of filming.' This new material was then organized in 'editing after filming', before the film-maker moved on to step 5, essentially that of looking for link shots. This step was labelled 'gauging by sight (hunting for montage fragments)' and was characterized as follows: 'instantaneous orienting in any visual environment so as to capture the essential link shots'—that is, to see what crucial elements were still missing from the edited footage. Vertov characterized this step as demanding 'exceptional attentiveness. A military rule: gauging by sight, speed, attack.' In other words vision was now subordinated to a strategic goal. Finally the footage was to be re-edited to 'bring out the core of the film-object', in other words, to structure perception conceptually so that minor, 'concealed themes' were finally revealed.<sup>15</sup>

Vertov adopted an exceptionally analytic approach to film-making which led him, as we have seen, into a detailed analysis of cinematic perception

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<sup>15</sup> Dziga Vertov, 'Provisional Instructions to Cinema-Eye Groups' [1926], in Annette Michelson, ed., *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov*, Berkeley, CA 1984, p. 72.



as a special form of perception, complex both in terms of time and of typology. Each of the stages in his six-stage model involved a different kind of look. The cinematic look was described as both 'oriented' and 'attentive'. Looking was also conceived as inseparable from editing—the look was organized, looking could be construed as 'inspecting', it was purposive (the hunt for missing elements which were finally 'captured'). Finally this oriented, attentive, goal-directed process of 'looking' was organized to reveal previously hidden elements and to bring out the essential 'core' of the object viewed. Vertov saw the process of looking as governed by the overall goal of reporting, in the serious journalistic sense of the word—presenting a picture of events which had really happened in such a way as to bring out their underlying meaning. Perceptual orienting, organizing, inspecting, hunting, etc., were all instruments of this final structuring of the visual material obtained by the kino-eye.

In *Man With A Movie Camera* Vertov discarded the use of intertitles, claiming, in effect, that the meaning of his film could be conveyed purely through images; or through the viewer's own perceptions when presented with an organized series of images. The specificity of film lay in its ability to record perceptions so that they could be perceived by others in a different place at a different time. In theory they could be unedited—a single continuous take, as in Hitchcock's *Rope*—but Vertov believed that editing was indispensable, because the process of inspecting and organizing perception that was necessary for full understanding involved numerous stages and choices, which the finished film encapsulated for the viewer. 'Editing is the human eye's summing-up of observations on the assigned theme'. The human eye's observations formed the foundation for a 'shooting plan', effectively inseparable from an editing plan. Finally, 'the author takes into account . . . the special properties of the "machine-eye".' The camera's look, in other words, has particular properties: it is framed, it is focused, it moves on certain specific axes—tilt, pan, track, and so on. It has its own rhythm of movement.<sup>16</sup>

For Vertov, selecting and editing were inseparable from looking. Looking was a mental activity as well as an optical one, a way of gathering objective information and learning the truth of things. For his contemporary Lev Kuleshov, on the contrary, looking was subjective. It could even be said to play tricks on you. According to the Kuleshov effect, the relationship

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<sup>16</sup> Dziga Vertov, 'From Kino-Eye to Radio-Eye' [1929], in *Kino-Eye*, p. 89.

of shot to shot overrides their actual content. In a celebrated experiment in perception, Kuleshov took a shot of the actor Mosjoukine's expressionless and neutral face and, according to the Soviet director Pudovkin, cut to it from a series of other shots—a bowl of steaming soup, a coffin, a child playing with a teddy bear. To the spectator, Mosjoukine's face seemed to register satisfaction, grief or joy, as determined by the image to which he was apparently reacting. Kuleshov himself described the experiment somewhat differently:

We had a dispute with a certain famous actor to whom we said: Imagine this scene: a man, sitting in jail for a long time, is starving because he is not given anything to eat; he is brought a plate of soup, is delighted by it, and gulps it down. Imagine another scene: a man in jail is given food, fed well, full to capacity, but he longs for his freedom, for the sight of birds, the sunlight, houses, clouds. A door is opened for him. He is led out onto the street, and he sees birds, clouds, the sun and houses and is extremely pleased by the sight. And so we asked the actor Will the face reacting to the soup and the face reacting to the sun appear the same on film or not? We were answered disdainfully: It is clear to anyone that the reaction to the soup and the reaction to freedom will be totally different.

Then we shot these two sequences, and regardless of how I transposed those shots and how they were examined, no-one was able to perceive any difference in the face of this actor, in spite of the fact that his performance in each shot was absolutely different . . . It still [reached] the viewer in the way intended by the editor, because the viewer himself will complete the sequence and see what is suggested to him by montage.<sup>7</sup>

The cinema, in other words, plays strange tricks on us. For Kuleshov, the content of the look was actually determined by the editing—the viewer saw what the editor intended, not what the face conveyed when seen in isolation or expressed to those on the set when the shot was taken. Many years later, this same experiment was described by Merleau-Ponty in *Les Temps Modernes*, albeit wrongly attributed to Pudovkin.

The first thing one noticed was that Mosjoukine seemed to be looking at the bowl, the young woman [in a coffin] and the child [with a teddy bear], and next one noted [in the cut back] that he was looking pensively at the dish, that he wore an expression of sorrow when looking at the woman, and that he had a glowing smile for the child.

Merleau-Ponty concludes that 'the meaning of a shot therefore depends on what precedes it in the movie, and this succession of scenes creates

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<sup>7</sup> Ronald Levaco, ed., *Kuleshov on Film*, Berkeley, CA 1974, p. 54.

a new reality which is not merely the sum of its parts.’<sup>18</sup> In other words, the reaction shot is determined by the point-of-view shot. We see or seem to see the appropriate reaction to whatever has just been looked at. What this implies, it seems to me, is that we see on the face of the other at whom we are looking the reaction we imagine we would have had if we had been looking at the same object. This takes us back, surely, to Kojève—we desire what the other desires, so if we see the other desiring soup, we recognize in the neutral face the delight we ourselves would feel. Our perception is determined by our transitive relationship with the other rather than reflecting what we have actually been shown. Perception, as Lacan might have put it, exists in the realm of the imaginary rather than the real.

### *Invisible guests*

Finally, I turn to *Rear Window* once again. In his book-length interview with François Truffaut, Hitchcock notes how James Stewart is presented in the same way that Kuleshov presented Mosjoukine:

I had the chance to make a purely cinematographic film. You have an immobile man looking outside. That is the first piece of film. The second piece shows you what he sees and the third shows you his reaction. This represents what we know as the purest possible expression of the cinematographic idea . . . We take a close-up of James Stewart, he is looking out of the window and he sees, for example, a little dog which someone is letting down into the courtyard in a basket; we go back to Stewart and he smiles. Now, instead of the little dog let down in the basket we show a young woman gyrating in front of an open window; we re-use the same close-up of Stewart smiling and now he's a dirty old man.<sup>19</sup>

For Hitchcock, the Kuleshov effect is pure cinema, precisely because it is manipulative—through the way it is contextualized, the reaction shot shows what the director wants us to see, rather than the original content of the shot. For Merleau-Ponty the Kuleshov experiment is what he calls a ‘temporal *gestalt*’: we understand its meaning not because of what we actually see but because of the temporal relationship between the images—first, the look; then, the looked-at; then the reaction. Merleau-Ponty argues that this is also how we see events in the real world, except

<sup>18</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, ‘The Film and the New Psychology’, [1948], in *Sense and Non-Sense*, Evanston, IL 1964, p. 54.

<sup>19</sup> François Truffaut, *Hitchcock*, New York 1984, pp. 216–9. Translation amended.

that the temporalization is much looser—we may easily miss some crucial element, some crucial moment—and consequently our perception is much less reliable. As Karel Reisz explained in his book on editing, the film-maker conventionally tries to show each key element of a complex event as it takes place in time, not from the point of view of a participant or even an actual spectator, but from that of an ideal onlooker: Renoir's camera as 'invisible guest'.<sup>20</sup> The viewer in the cinema will then create the complete temporal *gestalt* of the event from the fragmentary sequence of shots.

In fact, what the viewer is doing is recognizing and then extrapolating. Perception is not simply a process of recording, it is a process of synthesizing a totality from an analysis, from a selection of shots, just as Vertov explained. We perceive not simply looks but looks in a situation, taking place over a period of time, however short. In addition, the viewer's situation, like the reader's, is privileged by being extra-textual. Even when the spectator's gaze is apparently returned through a look directly to the camera, so that the character's eyes seem to meet those of the viewer, we know this is not a real moment of recognition, in Kojève's sense, because we know that the look from the screen is a disembodied one.

The cinema gives the spectator the luxury of knowing that he or she can never be seen, can never be implicated in the action of the film, will always remain invulnerable. Even if our experience of the cinema is voyeuristic, as many theorists have asserted on various grounds, the viewer is never vulnerable like the voyeur in Sartre's fable, never shamed. The spectator can disavow everything. From the point of view of the film, it is the spectator who is disembodied, who is pure ocularity, who lacks the embodiment which makes perception of others a social tie in the Hegelian sense. To the spectator, the characters on the screen are real, as long as the film lasts; but for them, the spectator—positioned far outside the circuits of desire—has no reality at all.

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<sup>20</sup> Karel Reisz, *The Technique of Film Editing*, London 1953.

SVEN LÜTTICKEN

## IDOLATRY AND ITS DISCONTENTS

CONTEMPORARY ART has long claimed the privilege—indeed, the duty—of criticizing the images produced by the mass-culture industry.<sup>1</sup> Now, however, both media images and works of art are increasingly coming under attack for religious reasons. It often seems as if Islamist fundamentalism has effectively conspired with the Western media and their Enlightenment rhetoric to create a culture war that perpetuates itself from one event to the next. These events (and pseudo-events) range from the dramatic murder of Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh to the Danish cartoon riots, Jack Straw's remarks on veils and the decision of the Deutsche Oper in Berlin to cancel a planned staging of Mozart's *Idomeneo*—in which the severed heads of Jesus, Mohammed and Buddha were to be shown alongside that of Poseidon. Sometimes there need be no event at all: media reports that some British banks no longer hand out piggy banks to children, so as not to offend Muslim customers, turned out to be just as unfounded as the end-of-year hysteria over the alleged banning of Christmas by overzealous, politically correct bureaucrats and managers.

So far, the art world has shown little inclination—at least on the institutional level—to respond to such real or perceived challenges to the spectacular regime of visibility that it is itself so keen on exposing. Nonetheless, individual artistic practices offer compelling reflections on the renewed vigour of monotheistic attacks on images and on the visual regime of the capitalist West as such; I focus here on Dutch examples, but within the broader context of the global religious contestation of the spectacle.

Many of the most prominent incidents in the current image wars involve the veiling or unveiling of the female body. In 2003, an Amsterdam tenement was decorated with a monumental mural of a nude woman, inspired by a poem by Jacob van Lennep, *Ode aan een roosje* ('Ode to a Rose'), which was splashed across the façade and the body of the woman; a clothed man, presumably the author, floated over the text and the woman's legs. Although the inhabitants of the neighbouring buildings, many of them Muslims, were polled prior to the work's execution (apparently with largely positive results), once completed the mural was attacked both verbally and physically, with black paint. In the end, a compromise was reached: the woman's pubic area was pixellated, turning it into an abstract grid. The ideological opposite of such revealing public art can be found in the town of Susa, Iran, in the form of a mural showing the upper part of a woman in Islamic dress, her face visible but her body concealed, her eyes demurely averted. An accompanying text proclaims: 'A woman modestly dressed is as a pearl in it's shell' [sic].<sup>2</sup>

Over the past few years, the appearance of women who adhere to a strict definition of *hijab* dress in European cities has provoked increasing controversy. This focuses above all on the veiling of the face, with only a slit left for the eyes—or even less, as in the Afghan *burqa*, which covers the eyes with an embroidered grille. After a group of Muslims who allegedly plotted to kidnap and kill a British Muslim soldier on leave from Iraq were arrested in early 2007, British newspapers showed a photo of three veiled women in Birmingham, one of them making a V-sign. Although this is an extreme case, images of veiled women have become a minor genre in European newspapers—one indication that the veil has come to function as a screen on which cultural anxieties and desires are projected, and not just from one side. This is not the place to explore the cultural history of the veil, which reaches back before the beginnings of Islam or Christianity, and often has social rather than religious connotations; nor to engage in the debate over whether the veil is actually prescribed by Islam, or is just a cultural habit; whether it is a means of oppression, or a choice made by strong and emancipated women. The fact is that the polysemic veil has become a logotype of the dangerous Muslim other;

<sup>1</sup> A revised version of this essay will appear in the forthcoming *Citizens and Subjects: The Netherlands, for example*, edited by Maria Hlavajova, Rosi Braidotti and Charles Esche, as part of the Dutch contribution to the 2007 Venice Biennale.

<sup>2</sup> I know the Susa mural through a photo taken by Frank Denys.

it has become a prop in today's image wars. Islamists use it as a highly visible statement of their ability to protect Muslim values in the face of an antagonistic Western culture, while Western liberals perceive it as an attack on such a culture, often focusing on the question of women's rights. In this respect they follow in the footsteps of the far-from-liberal Lord Cromer, British consul-general in Egypt in the late nineteenth century, who already ideologized the veil as a sign of the oppression of women. This reading at least has the virtue of being open to appropriation by Muslim women: a Dutch news photograph taken in late 2006 shows the full-body veil being used by Muslim women in a protest against their deportation to Afghanistan, where they would be forced to wear such *burqas*—they have wrapped themselves not only in *burqas*, but in pictures of the then Immigration Minister Rita Verdonk, or 'Iron Rita'.

The status of the veil as a media myth that would have delighted Roland Barthes—the veil as sign for Oriental mystery and danger, hiding an inaccessible, exotic feminine body—has been countered by (mainly female) artists including Shirin Neshat and Zineb Sedira.<sup>3</sup> The Dutch artist Fransje Killaars, who in the early 1990s switched from painting to making installations with textiles, has recently taken to draping some of her bedspreads, with their brightly coloured grids, on tailor's dummies. These abstract and impractical full-body veils draw attention to their materiality and sensuality—to their own surface and texture rather than their status as obstructions of the gaze, as a hindrance to seeing what lies beneath. Titled *Figures* and posed in groups, they form a constellation that invites comparison and contrast. Killaars also shows one or two dummies that are not covered in the manner of a *burqa*, but around which a bedspread is draped from the neck down in the manner of a cape. In contrast to the *burqa* forms, the 'cape' *Figures* use dummies whose heads have been removed; the cape is crowned by nothing. By 'exposing' the veiled face as a void, these *acéphales* join the other works in privileging the cover over the covered, the veil over the veiled. If the media represent the veil as a blot that obscures the essence, the woman beneath—a woman supposedly in need of unveiling to make her free—Killaars's *Figures* make the veil visible as something integral rather than exterior to the figure.

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<sup>3</sup> See various contributions in the exhibition catalogue *Veil: Veiling, Representation and Contemporary Art*, London and Cambridge, MA 2003. The concept of the exhibition was Zineb Sedira's.

Important as work such as Killaars's is, there is no denying that it remains marginal in a culture in which the veil has been hijacked by right-wing mouthpieces who routinely invoke the Enlightenment in a way that reduces critique to neatly packaged dogma for the age of the soundbite. One such Enlightenment fundamentalist is Somali-born Ayaan Hirsi Ali, who during her years in Holland—she has since moved on to the US, to work at the neoconservative American Enterprise Institute—wrote the script for a short film on the role of women in Islam. Programmatically titled *Submission (part 1)*, the 2004 film was directed by Theo van Gogh, who famously described Muslims as backward 'goat-fuckers'; he paid with his life for *Submission* when he was stabbed to death on an Amsterdam street in broad daylight by a young fundamentalist now famous as Mohammed B. *Submission* shows a woman wearing a dark but transparent veil that reveals parts of her body, upon which Koranic verses on woman's submissive role have been written in ornate calligraphy. The film's voice-over monologue contains harrowing stories of various forms of abuse, and depicts the veil as a prison, the innermost circle of an extremely restricted world. The element of truth in this is compromised by the reduction of the veil, of its ambiguity and contradictions, to a cartoon image. Turning women wearing veils into the faceless face of otherness allows Hirsi Ali and her allies to ignore the questions raised by the rise of the veil in Europe—questions that can be uncomfortable for the heroic defenders of western liberal values.

Mid-twentieth-century pioneers of radical Islamism such as Sayyid Qutb of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood saw capitalist culture as the return of *jahiliyya*, the paganism of pre-Islamic Arabia. This pagan state was characterized by *shirk*, the associating of other gods or beings with Allah; *shirk* functions as an equivalent of Judaic or Christian conceptions of idolatry. Like idolatrous Rome for the Christians, the *jahiliyya* was also associated with uncontrolled and promiscuous sexuality; indeed, the early Jewish conception of idolatry frequently compared it to adultery. Ever since Sayyid Qutb, the comparative sexual freedom and sexualization of the public sphere have been regarded as crucial symptoms of the new Western idolatry. Not only is thought itself turned into an idol by Western rationalists, as Qutb stated with horror; sinking even lower, the Westerners also idolize the body. But then, perhaps this is just a front for the true idolatry: as the Iranian thinker Ali Shariati stated, in an idiom that may seem oddly familiar, sexual freedom is 'part of a new exploitation, a type of limitless deception, which the impure system of



Western capitalism produces'. Behind the seductive appearance of commodified sexuality lie 'great idols and the three faces of the contemporary religious trinity: exploitation, colonialism and despotism'.<sup>4</sup>

By blending Islamic phraseology with that of Marxist political theory, of which he is critical even while using it against capitalism, Shariati reappropriated and resacralized a discourse that itself appropriated and transformed Jewish and Christian elements. Today's European and American Enlightenment fundamentalists, who specialize in using a critique of Islam and of Muslim societies to deflect attention from the West's destructive political, military and economic operations, attempt to disavow any link between religion and the 'Western values' they claim to represent. However, the Enlightenment is scarcely thinkable without the monotheistic critique of idolatry; nor, for that matter, are modern critical theory or artistic practice. The symbolic gesture of 'unveiling the truth', which has been so popular since the Enlightenment, is indebted to this heritage—and the use of the veil in contemporary Islamism, paradoxical as it may seem, can itself be seen as following rather than breaking the logic of unveiling.<sup>5</sup> Is the veil not effectively being used to unmask and lay bare the limits of Western liberalism—to reveal it as a sham, an ideology in the service of capitalist powers?

As theorists and historians of iconoclasm gleefully point out, iconoclasts also create new images; contemporary practitioners like the Taliban are media-savvy enough to be fully aware of this dialectic, and to exploit it.<sup>6</sup> As used by Islamists, the veil is iconoclastic, an attack on the idolatrous adoration of the human body in the West. When artist Lidwien Van de Ven engaged with the ubiquitous iconography of the veil in her work, two forms of iconoclasm were deployed. In an exhibition in Paris in 2006, Van de Ven showed a photo she had taken outside the French embassy in London, showing veiled women protesting against the anti-veil ruling for French schools. This and other images were pasted directly onto the

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<sup>4</sup> Ali Shariati, *Fatima is Fatima*, Tehran 1981, ch. 5.

<sup>5</sup> On the Enlightenment iconography of unveiling Isis (mysterious nature), see Jan Assmann, *Moses der Ägypter. Entzifferung einer Gedächtnisspur*, Frankfurt 2000, pp. 188–96.

<sup>6</sup> For a routinely and somewhat tiresomely provocative take on Islamist terrorists as iconophiles who reinforce rather than attack the belief in images, see Boris Groys, 'The Fate of Art in the Age of Terror', in Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel, eds, *Making Things Public*, Karlsruhe 2005, pp. 970–5.

wall; in the second stage of the exhibition, they were washed over with a thin coat of white paint that allowed the images to shine through. Both obscuring the photographed veils and giving them a new visibility, Van de Ven endowed the media myth with an ambiguously physical, and at the same time unreal and ethereal, status. Van de Ven's gentle artistic iconoclasm makes the underlying image visible again—visible as representing not stubborn or stupid backwardness, but an iconoclastic act in its own right; an act whose religious as well as political nature needs to be addressed, rather than sociologized or pathologized.

### *From one spectacle to another*

The protests occasioned by the Danish cartoons of the prophet Mohammed reflected anger (however manipulated) not only at the fact that Mohammed was caricatured, but at the fact that he was depicted at all. After all, this is a breach of the ban on depicting the prophet which is derived from a certain interpretation of the Mosaic ban on idolatry. The current image wars represent a new wave of the monotheistic idolatry critique enshrined in the Second Commandment in Exodus 20:4, forbidding graven images 'or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth'. This is elaborated upon in Deuteronomy 4:15–19, where the Israelites are reminded that they 'saw no manner of similitude on the day that the LORD spake unto you in Horeb out of the midst of the fire', and that representations of people and animals should be avoided because they might lead to 'corruption', to worshipping of these images (a similar danger existing in the case of the sun, moon and stars).<sup>7</sup> There are, in effect, two prohibitions: God must not be represented; nor must living creatures, planets or anything else that might be worshipped, so as to avoid idolatry. But the first error, or sin, is idolatry as well. Idolatry is not only the worship of false gods but also the worship of Jehovah in an image; the image itself becomes a false god.<sup>8</sup> At first, worshipping other gods was a real temptation; later, when this was no longer a danger, idolatrous tendencies within Jewish monotheism were seen as a risk.

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<sup>7</sup> Different religions count the Commandments in differing ways. In Judaism and most Protestant churches, the ban on idolatry is part of the Second Commandment, in Catholicism, it is subsumed under the First.

<sup>8</sup> Edwyn Bevan, *Holy Images: An Inquiry into Idolatry and Image-Worship in Ancient Paganism and in Christianity*, London 1940, p. 39.

In practice, the degree to which images were made and the way in which they were used over the centuries varied widely in the Jewish religion, as well as in Christianity and in Islam. The Christian doctrine of the Incarnation mitigated the ban on the depiction of God and his creation; God had become man, the word had become flesh, and therefore open to depiction. Of course, Byzantine iconoclasts and Protestants argued that such images could still be put to idolatrous use, sometimes adding that images of Christ could only represent one of his two natures—the physical one, not his divinity. The Muslim fear of a relapse into *shirk*, the ‘associating’ of other deities or powers with God, manifests itself in a rather extreme ban on *tasweer*, images that might stimulate such idolatry. However, although contemporary Western as well as Islamist ideologues are intent on making Islam appear monolithic, the ban on depicting Mohammed was also subject to successive waves of radicalization and relaxation; it is not as absolute as some contemporary ideologists suggest, as quite a number of old miniatures show.<sup>9</sup> The repression of such unwelcome historical complexities allows fundamentalists to create a Manichean dichotomy between Islam and the idolatrous West—the new *jahiliyya*. This discourse can be seen as a more radical form of the Christian critique of Western culture.

For Christians, the Roman empire remained the paradigm of an idolatrous society. Roman games in particular had been attacked by Tertullian in his *De Spectaculis* as prime examples of *eidolatreia*, and the fascination with Roman spectacle and decadence in late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century culture, from the paintings of Gérôme and Alma-Tadema to later film productions, suggested that modern society might be a Rome returned—the triumph of idolatry disguised by Christian rhetoric. However, the Christian criticism of capitalist modernity was increasingly supplanted by a secularized discourse hailing from the Enlightenment and shaped by, yet also transforming and transcending, its monotheistic roots. In *Du Culte des dieux fétiches* (1760), a text that encapsulates the Enlightenment’s transformation of monotheistic *topoi* into instruments of secular critique, Charles de Brosses claimed to unveil the most primitive form of religion, the embryonic first stirrings of idolatry: fetishism, or the worship of random objects rather than statues or other man-made images. Although the Enlightenment subjected

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<sup>9</sup> See the ‘Mohammed Image archive’, at [www.zombietime.com](http://www.zombietime.com).

religious dogma to an open-ended critique, this opposition of dogma and critique should not obscure the fact that the gestures of 'revealing' gods to be idols and long-held truths to be superstitions are fundamentally the same, and that monotheistic discourse on pagan religion constituted a nascent form of critique—an idolatry critique transformed by the modern critique of religions and society. Religious dogmatism already contained the seeds of critique, just as critique may still be crucially dependent on dogma.

In a letter written shortly after Theodor Adorno's death, in which he attempted to explain why his friend had not been buried according to Jewish rites, Max Horkheimer claimed that critical theory was based on the Second Commandment—the ban on representations of God, or, in more fundamentalist interpretations, on representation of all living beings.<sup>10</sup> Modern critical theory, in other words, analysed and opposed fascism and the culture industry as latter-day idolatry. Although Horkheimer's remark was obviously made during highly emotional circumstances, it is true that the modern critique of representation is in many ways a transformation of the monotheistic discourse on idolatry: the divine Commandment fostered a suspicious and critical mentality that was finally turned against dogma itself. From De Brosses to Marx and beyond, the concept of the fetish as a primitive precursor of the idol still derives from monotheistic idolatry critique; Marx, of course, turned De Brosses's African proto-idol into a capitalist commodity fetish, just as irrational and mystifying. However, in contrast to 'idols' according to monotheism, such fetishes are seen as a betrayal of what true humanity might be, rather than as transgressions of divine law. The difference between an early Christian diatribe such as Tertullian's *De Spectaculis* and Debord's Marxian treatise on *The Society of the Spectacle* is immense, even if the latter is indebted—however indirectly—to the former.

Jeroen De Rijke and Willem De Rooij's film *Of Three Men* (1998) constitutes a montage—a possible dialogue—between the two forms of idolatry critique, religious and secular. The film shows the interior of an Amsterdam mosque that was formerly a Catholic church, built in the 1920s in a rather bulky and sober modernist-historicist style. The

<sup>10</sup> Max Horkheimer, letter to Otto Herz, September 1, 1969, in Max Horkheimer, *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. 18. *Briefwechsel 1949–1973*, Frankfurt 1996, p. 743.

interior has been stripped of its Catholic paraphernalia; chandeliers and a bare floor complete the visual transformation. The film mostly focuses on the changing effects of the light coming through the windows; this light is largely artificial, and changes quickly. There is an obvious connection with seventeenth-century paintings, by Saenredam and others, depicting the whitewashed interiors of Protestant churches that were once Catholic, and highly painted. Whereas representations of such purified spaces are effortlessly contemplated for their aesthetic qualities, the image of a mosque sabotages such contemplation. In today's Europe, after all, mosques are often regarded with a wary eye. By treating the space in a formal way, as a receptacle for a light show, De Rijke and De Rooij suggest that a mosque too is a potential place of enlightenment—or Enlightenment—and reflection, just like those former Dutch churches that now function as cultural centres or spaces of debate.

In addition to overlaying a church and a mosque with their diverging connotations, *Of Three Men* also juxtaposes seventeenth-century pictorial representations of spaces created by iconoclastic fury with the black screen's re-enactment of modern artistic iconoclasm. Before the mosque is shown, at the beginning of the film, the image is black; then it appears that the camera's view has been blocked by some men in dark cloaks. While this recalls the occasional Hollywood practice of disguising cuts by having black clothing or some dark object momentarily block the view, its length and position at the beginning of the film also recall modern artistic iconoclasm—for example Debord's first film, *Hurlements en faveur de Sade* (1952), which contains long stretches of complete blackness. One need not accept Clement Greenberg's story of the Kantian origins and smooth progression of modernism to acknowledge modern art's self-critical bent—which also enables it to reflect on its own iconoclastic elements, and iconoclasm in general.<sup>11</sup> A 2006 installation by Krijn de Koning and Gert Jan Kocken combined three of Kocken's photographs of traces of iconoclastic rage in Dutch churches, showing mutilated stone reliefs, with a De Koning mural surrounding those pictures. Consisting of an irregular, meandering blue-and-white geometric pattern, the mural spreads out over the walls and ceiling like a bulky modernist ornament. Once more a montage of iconoclasm and

<sup>11</sup> Clement Greenberg, 'Modernist Painting' [1960], in Greenberg, *The Collected Essays and Criticism 4: Modernism with a Vengeance*, London and Chicago 1993, pp. 85–93

critiques is effected, setting the stage for a possible debate that would confound 'war on terror' verities.

### *Against visibility*

If the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation legitimized the creation of a rich visual culture, the growing autonomy of this culture from religion and its integration into the emerging capitalist culture industry of the nineteenth century fuelled fears of a relapse into idolatry. Lew Wallace, author of *Ben-Hur*, the story of a Jewish prince whose life intersects at various points with that of Jesus, decided against the direct portrayal of Jesus in dramatic versions of his novel. Thus in the 1925 film adaptation, we see a Last Supper scene directly inspired by Renaissance paintings, Leonardo's *Last Supper* mural in particular, except for the fact that the sight of the centrally seated Christ is blocked by a lone Apostle sitting in front of him. All the viewer sees of Jesus is a halo and some hands. Possibly the figure in the foreground is Judas, who was often set apart from the others in Medieval and Renaissance paintings—but who was not, of course, placed in front of Christ. What made representations of Christ particularly sensitive in the context of *Ben-Hur* screenings was their character as commercial—even if devout—spectacles, complete with chariot races. It is no surprise that Muslim film directors took an even more radical stance on the issue of depicting Mohammed: in a 1976 film version of the life of Mohammed and the rise of Islam, *The Message*, director Moustapha Akkad scrupulously adhered to the ban on representing the prophet, instead choosing a rather risqué method of integrating Mohammed into the narrative—at certain moments, the use of subjective camera-angles makes the viewer see things *through Mohammed's eyes*.

Not only Muslims, but strict Protestants too have long struggled with the rise of modern image reproduction; the 'dictatorship of visibility' in today's media-saturated society multiplies the risk of idolatry. The radical Calvinist opposition to this dictatorship is commemorated in a 2003 video by Arnoud Holleman, which shows girls in the Dutch Calvinist enclave of Staphorst ducking away and hiding their faces when they realize they are being filmed. In this appropriation and editing of 1950s film footage, Holleman elegantly recalls that a radical rejection of being portrayed, of being subjected to the dictatorship of visibility, is not some strange and exotic recent import from the east. And of course mainstream Muslim

scholars' judgements, or *fatwas*, have long opposed the fundamentalist rejection of photography, film and video on theological grounds:

Photography as a medium of communication or for the simple, innocent retention of memories without the taint of reverence/*shirk* does not fall under the category of forbidden *Tasweer*. One finds a number of traditions from the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, condemning people who make *Tasweer*, which denotes painting or carving images or statues. It was closely associated with paganism or *shirk* . . . In other words, *Tasweer* was forbidden precisely for the reason that it was a means leading to *shirk*. The function of photography today does not fall under the above category. Even some of the scholars who had been once vehemently opposed to photography under the pretext that it was a form of forbidden *Tasweer* have later changed their position on it—as they allow even for their own pictures to be taken and published in newspapers, for videotaping lectures and for presentations; whereas in the past, they would only allow it in exceptional cases such as passports, drivers' licenses, etc. The change in their view of photography is based on their assessment of the role of photography.<sup>12</sup>

However, photography can certainly be abused: 'To take pictures of leaders and heroes and hang them on the walls may not belong to the same category of permission. This may give rise to a feeling of reverence and hero worship, which was precisely the main thrust of the prohibition of *Tasweer*.' In fact, the cult of 'martyrs' (suicide bombers) whose images are widely disseminated as models indicates that contemporary Islamist terrorists fully participate in the spectacle, eagerly producing images of destruction and embracing the dialectic of iconoclasm, in which destruction begets new—but unsettling—images. The media- and iconophobic Taliban took care to document the destruction of the giant Bamiyan Buddha sculptures. However, artist Sean Snyder has made the intriguing suggestion that image production by radical Islamists may still be deliberately iconoclastic; the bad technical quality of videos produced by Al-Qaeda may be intentional; far from primitive, these videos would be actively primitivist, opposing 'poor' images to the glitzy Western spectacle.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> *Fatwa* by Sheikh Ahmad Kutty of the Islamic Institute of Toronto, available at [www.islamonline.net](http://www.islamonline.net).

<sup>13</sup> Sean Snyder, 'Some Byproducts: Thoughts on the Visual Rhetoric of PSYOP', Maria Hlavajova and Jill Winder, eds, *Concerning War: A Critical Reader*, Utrecht and Frankfurt 2006, p. 185.

In 2002, Arnoud Holleman was one of the editors of an issue of *Re-Magazine* that masqueraded as the Spring 2007 issue. In a series of entries dating from the distant past through the 1980s and 1990s to the future (from a 2002 perspective), a nameless 'we' reflected on various public and private events, culminating in a decision to eschew images; a decision dated, tellingly, to the year 2001, the year of 9/11 and the beginning of the end of the iconophobic Taliban regime. 'We couldn't cope with the absence of pictures. It created irrational fears. We couldn't see what was happening in Afghanistan. We *needed* images.' While this still reflects the general Western attitude, the 'we' soon make an iconoclastic turn of their own: 'Everything was image and nobody asked himself or herself why the ban was being violated. As an experiment, we covered or removed all images from our home. It cleared our heads. We asked friends to do the same.' In the end, this apparent iconophobia may be at the service of an intensified perception of images: 'We need the absence of images to appreciate the quality of an image when we see one.'<sup>14</sup> This iconoclasm, an 'internalized form of the Second Commandment' that is not explicitly religious, searches for 'an alternative to the maelstrom of visual culture'.<sup>15</sup>

According to the Marxian analysis of Debord, the spectacle is not a matter of images or of media technology per se, but of the capitalist mode of production leading to the fetishistic projection of social life onto commodities, lived reality becoming a reified representation. As if to prove that he was no iconophobe, Debord turned the second volume of his autobiographical book *Panegyric* into a collection of pictures, noting that he appreciated images which have not been 'artificially separated from their meaning'. Although his stated intention of using pictures as 'iconographic proof' to illustrate a 'true discourse' betrays a secularized Christian desire to prevent images becoming too independent from the word, the pictures in *Panegyric*, all relating to Debord's life and work, nonetheless develop a pull of their own.<sup>16</sup> Minimizing the number of images in the '2007' issue of *Re-Magazine*, which only contains a few photo sequences interspersed among the pages of text, Holleman and his

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<sup>14</sup> Preceding quotations in this paragraph all from *Re-Magazine* #23, Spring 2007 (2002), unpaginated.

<sup>15</sup> Arnoud Holleman, 'The Second Commandment', text distributed at the Stedelijk Museum as part of Holleman's contribution to the group show *Just in Time*, 2006.

<sup>16</sup> Guy Debord, *Panegyric*, London 2004.



collaborators question precisely the production of images separated from their meaning—images that veil rather than reveal, or veil by revealing.

Recently, Bruno Latour and others have zoomed in on the relationship between monotheistic idolatry critique and modern secular critique in order to discredit both: if, on the one hand, the monotheistic critique leads to iconoclastic violence while, on the other hand, secular critique has undergone inflation and degenerated into a habit, should not critique as such be treated with suspicion? Is not the whole rhetoric of unveiling the truth and destroying idols, fetishes and myths dubious and dangerous?<sup>17</sup> While it is undeniable that 'criticality' is prone to becoming its own simulation, it would be the height of bad timing to abandon critique at a moment when both religious fundamentalists and the self-proclaimed defenders of the Enlightenment use their respective versions of idolatry critique to deflect attention from their inability to solve today's pressing social, economic and ecological problems. Works like De Rijke and De Rooij's *Of Three Men*, Killaars's *Figures*, Van de Ven's overpainted photos and Holleman's magazine strongly suggest the need to effect a montage of various forms of critique—religious and secular as well as 'Western' and 'Muslim'—in order to prevent them from becoming slogans in the culture wars staged by both religious and secular reactionaries.

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<sup>17</sup> Bruno Latour, 'Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern', *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 30, no. 2, 2003–04. See also Bruno Latour, 'What is Iconoclasm? Or Is There a World Beyond the Image Wars?', in Latour and Peter Weibel, eds, *Iconoclasm Beyond the Image Wars in Science, Religion and Art*, Karlsruhe 2002, pp. 14–37.

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STEPHEN GRAHAM

## WAR AND THE CITY

**W**ESTERN MILITARY STRATEGY was long premised on the avoidance of urban combat, with air strikes the preferred method of subduing large conurbations. Cities were seen as targets, not battlefields. But today, the cityscapes of the global South have emerged as paradigmatic conflict zones. Since the end of the Cold War, America's militarized thrust into the Middle East and Central Eurasia has focused Pentagon planners' attention on the burgeoning Arab and Third World cities that are now deemed *de facto* sites of current and future warfare for US forces. While the 'revolution in military affairs' emphasized overhead dominance, the losing battle for the streets of Iraq has sharpened the Pentagon's focus on battles within the micro-geographies of slums, *favelas*, industrial districts and *casbahs*, as well as on globe-spanning stealth and surveillance technologies.<sup>1</sup>

For defence strategists, the October 1993 defeat of elite Army Rangers by armed teenage boys on the streets of Mogadishu was seen as a wake-up call. The civilian resisters inflicted 60 per cent casualties on the American troops. But, as Mike Davis has pointed out, the US military was initially slow to incorporate scenarios of Third World urban warfare into its training programmes. In 1996 the Army War College's journal was warning that 'the future of warfare lies in the streets, sewers, high-rise buildings, and sprawl of houses that form the broken cities of the world'.<sup>2</sup> In 1999, a contributor to the *Marine Corps Gazette* argued urgently that most military training sites were out of phase with 'the urban sprawl that dominates critical areas of the world today . . . We know we will fight mostly in urban areas. Yet, we conduct the vast majority of our training in rural areas—the hills of Camp Pendleton, the deserts of Twentynine Palms, the woods of Camp Lejeune, the jungles of Okinawa.'<sup>3</sup> A RAND Report on the provision of military training

sites, commissioned by the US Congress in the aftermath of the invasion of Iraq, concurred:

US armed forces have thus far been unable to adequately reproduce the challenges their soldiers, sailors, marines and airmen meet in the towns and cities of Iraq and Afghanistan . . . More than a decade after the demise of the Warsaw Pact, the Berlin Wall and the Soviet Union, too many urban training sites, simulations and case studies still remind us of the Cold War rather than Mogadishu, Iraqi towns and cities, or Afghan villages.<sup>4</sup>

A hidden archipelago of mini-cities is now being constructed across the US sunbelt, presenting a jarring contrast to the surrounding strip-mall suburbia; other Third World cityscapes are rising out of the deserts of Kuwait and Israel, the downs of Southern England, the plains of Germany and the islands of Singapore. Some are replete with lines of drying washing, continuous loop tapes playing calls to prayer, wandering donkeys, Arabic graffiti, ersatz minarets and mosques; on occasion, civilian 'populations' are bused in to wander about and role-play in Arab dress. Others have 'slum' or '*favela*' districts, with built-in olfactory machines that can simulate the smells of death and decay. These are the new training fields for the US and UK forces that will be dispatched to Baghdad, Ramadi, Fallujah, Najaf or Karbala—for warfare, like the rest of the world, is rapidly being urbanized. Unmarked on maps, and largely unnoticed by urban-design, architecture and planning communities, these sites constitute a kind of shadow global-city system. They are capsules of space designed to mimic the strategic environment of the 'feral city', as one US military theorist has called it—now seen as a critical arena for future wars.<sup>5</sup>

### *Dress rehearsals*

The construction of simulation military targets is not new. During World War II, streets of exact-replica Berlin tenements were created at

<sup>1</sup> Mike Davis, 'The urbanization of Empire: Megacities and the laws of chaos', *Social Text*, vol. 22, no. 4, 2004, pp. 9–15.

<sup>2</sup> Maj. Ralph Peters, 'Our Soldiers, Their Cities', *Parameters*, Spring 1996; cited in Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums*, London 2006, p. 203.

<sup>3</sup> Col. Thomas Hammes, 'Time to get serious about urban warfare training', *Marine Corps Gazette*, April 1999.

<sup>4</sup> Russell Glenn et al., 'Preparing for the Proven Inevitable: An Urban Operations Training Strategy for America', RAND National Defense Research Institute, Santa Monica 2006, pp. xv, 263.

<sup>5</sup> Richard Norton, 'Feral Cities', *Naval War College Review*, vol. 56, no. 4, 2004.

the Dugway Proving Grounds in Utah, designed by the exiled German architect Eric Mendelsohn. Alongside them stood a cluster of Japanese wood and rice-paper houses created by Antonin Raymond, an American architect who had worked in Japan and who scoured the US for authentic types of Russian spruce for their construction.<sup>6</sup> These buildings were used by the US Chemical Warfare Corps to fine-tune the incendiary bombs that would raze Japanese and German cities. To ensure accuracy, the tenements were filled with authentic German furniture, and the buildings hosed to mimic the temperate climate of Berlin. Even during the Cold War, a sense of spectacle ensured that atomic and thermonuclear bombs were exploded near simulated suburban homes, complete with white picket-fences, and families of mannequins placed around the table having mock meals.<sup>7</sup>

The city replicas of the 21st century involve a different relationship to political violence, however. Rather than rehearsals for urban annihilation through total war, their purpose is to prepare ground troops for military occupation and counter-insurgency warfare. An early example of this new approach was the \$14 million mock-Arab city constructed at Israel's Tze'elim base in the Negev desert. The site, known as 'Chicago', was explicitly built to generalize the lessons of Israeli incursions into Palestinian cities and refugee camps. The 'town' is split into four quarters, with apartment buildings, a marketplace, shops, a mosque and a refugee camp. It is wired up with the latest surveillance equipment to monitor the trainee Israeli soldiers as they practise blasting their way into Palestinian homes. Grotesquely, a range of mechanical cut-out caricatures of bearded Arab men, constructed by the prop department at the Israeli National Theatre, are programmed to pop up in windows and at street corners during live-fire exercises. Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin, two Israeli photographers who succeeded in making a detailed study of the site, have reflected that:

It is difficult to pinpoint what it is about the place that is so disturbing. Perhaps it's the combination of the vicariousness and the violence. It's as if the soldiers have entered the enemy's private domain while he's sleeping or out for lunch . . . It's a menacing intrusion into the intimate.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Mike Davis, *Dead Cities And Other Tales*, New York 2002, pp. 65–84.

<sup>7</sup> Laura McEnaney, *Civil Defense Begins at Home*, Princeton 2000.

<sup>8</sup> Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin, *Chicago*, Göttingen 2007.

It was here, the photographers report, that American Special Forces were introduced to 'Arab realities' in the run-up to the first Gulf War. Full-dress rehearsals at the site have included an attempted assassination of Saddam Hussein and the battle for Fallujah.

'Middle-Eastern cities' have sprouted at military bases in the US over the last few years, although in the assessment of the 2006 RAND Report these remain inadequate; casualty rates in urban combat for untrained soldiers are around 25–30 per cent. To address future 'Military Operations on Urban Terrain' training needs, the RAND team recommendations include the construction of four new 'cities', with more than 300 structures each.<sup>9</sup> By 2010, the Pentagon plans to have over sixty MOUT training zones around the world. While some will be little more than air-portable sets of containers, others will be extensive sites that mimic whole city districts, with 'airports' or surrounding 'countryside'.

One of the most important new urban-warfare training facilities is Zussman Village at Fort Knox, Kentucky. Here a new 30-acre, \$13 million 'city' is able to accommodate hundreds of role-playing 'insurgents', who wear *keffiyehs* and are armed with AK-47s and RPGs, as well as 1,500 US military personnel, along with their tanks, personnel carriers and helicopters. It is equipped with radio and TV stations that can broadcast in Hebrew, Arabic or Russian. Zussman Village includes mock junkyards, mosques, cemeteries, petrol stations, sewers, electrical sub-stations, train tracks and bridges. A 'Third World slum' is currently under construction by the railroad. To simulate a war-torn environment, the site is deliberately smothered in mud, and the unmaintained sewer system is filled with live possums and rats, as well as rubber snakes bought from local toy shops. The synthetic odours of rotting bodies, raw sewage and contaminated water can be produced on demand.<sup>10</sup> A speciality is the use of vapourized propane that can be converted into aerial fireballs, simulating the exploding cars and burning buildings troops will encounter in Iraq. As explained by the Kentucky engineering firm that provided the technology:

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<sup>9</sup> With the aim of being accessible to soldiers' home districts, these will be located at the existing Fort Polk base in Louisiana, at Fort Hood in Texas, in the Kentucky/North Carolina/Georgia region and the American Southwest.

<sup>10</sup> Roxana Tiron, 'Army training site brings to life the horrors of war', *National Defense Magazine*, July 2001.

Most of our military operations are conducted at night. When an explosion occurs and a soldier is wearing night-vision goggles, his vision goes blank. He needs to learn how to react to this type of situation and resist the urge to have his concentration lapse. It's human nature to take that second to stare at a fire or explosion, but in combat, soldiers need to react quickly . . . Urban warfare has a much higher rate of casualties than in the open battlefield. The action and the violence are much closer and much faster.<sup>11</sup>

The largest US urban-warfare complex of all, however, is emerging at the Joint Readiness Training Center at Fort Polk, Louisiana. Eighteen mock-Iraqi villages are being constructed in this 100,000-acre site, detailed down to kebab stands, and even 'mass graves' created by burying rotting bones from local butchers' shops. Included in the exercises—carried out by 44,000 Iraq-bound soldiers between 2003 and 2005 alone—are 1,200 role-playing extras, dressed in Arab gear, who impersonate Iraqi tribesmen, police and civilians. Two hundred of these are Arab-Americans, mostly originating from Iraq itself. Screenwriters are on hand to write 'character sheets' for each participant, based on whether they are programmed to be 'friendly', 'neutral' or 'hostile' towards the US forces.

In a mirror-image reversal of the more familiar global marketing contests in which cities parade their gentrification, cultural planning and boosterism, here the marks of success are decay and an architecture of collapse. Col. James Cashwell, a US squadron commander, reported after an exercise in an urban-warfare training city at George Air Force base in California that 'the advantage of the base is that it is ugly, torn up, all the windows are broken [and trees] have fallen down in the street. It's perfect for the replication of a war-torn city.'<sup>12</sup> Evaluating existing MOUT sites for the features deemed most challenging in undertaking military operations within large, global-South cities, the RAND researchers awarded the highest points to those with 'clutter, debris, filth', 'slums, shanty towns, walled compounds', 'subterranean complexes' and simulated 'government, hospital, prison, asylum structures', such as the Marines' Twentynine Palms facility in California.<sup>13</sup> An officer at the US Baumholder Base in Germany reported that sol-

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<sup>11</sup> Available at [www.waremc.com](http://www.waremc.com), under 'Turnkey Projects'

<sup>12</sup> J. R. Wilson, 'Army expands home-based MOUT training', *Military Training Technology*, March 2003.

<sup>13</sup> RAND, 'Preparing for the Proven Inevitable', p. 243.

diers repeatedly asked for donkeys, goats and other animals in the MOUT training site to help simulate life in Iraqi cities.<sup>14</sup> Some locations integrate multi-sensory systems for projecting special effects; Fort Wainwright, Alaska can provide the smell of diesel fumes, burning rubber, even burning flesh.<sup>15</sup>

The RAND Report also explored the possibility of appropriating entire 'ghost towns' within the continental USA that have been deindustrialized and largely abandoned. Attention has focused on the former copper-mining town of Playas in southwest New Mexico, which has already been used as a 'generic American suburb under simulated attack' to instruct anti-terrorist squads for the Department of Homeland Security.<sup>16</sup> The RAND team suggests that Playas could be improved as a training site if 'the architecture of the abandoned town were modified to include walled compounds of the type that US troops in Iraq and Afghanistan must at times isolate and clear.' However, live-fire exercises would probably not be possible, 'since the owners . . . would consider the structural repair costs prohibitive'.<sup>17</sup> Despite being portrayed as a 'ghost town', a few remaining residents cling on in Playas, making their living mainly as extras in urban-war and terrorist exercises. A network of 'low-population' towns in North Dakota is also being considered for such a role, and the RAND Report recommends further investigation into the use of abandoned factories, offices, strip malls, schools, hospitals and entertainment complexes.

Another proposal is to use densely populated metropolitan areas for MOUT training, modelled on the Urban Warrior and Project Metropolis exercises that took place between 1999 and 2000. In these, Marines 'invaded' Little Rock, Chicago, Oakland and Charleston, staging major amphibious and airborne landings (also designed to generate recruitment interest) before acting out the disablement of electricity, communications, transport and water infrastructure in abandoned hospitals and sewer networks. Such exercises will remain necessary, RAND

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<sup>14</sup> Cited in Terry Boyd, 'Training site replicates Iraqi village', *Stars and Stripes*, 26 July 2006.

<sup>15</sup> Associated Press, 'Urban combat training center will be Army's largest', *Citizen Review Online*, December 2002

<sup>16</sup> See Steve Rowell, 'Playas, New Mexico: A Modern Ghost-town Braces for the Future', *The Lay of the Land: Center for Land Use Interpretation Newsletter*, vol. 28, Spring 2005.

<sup>17</sup> RAND, 'Preparing for the Proven Inevitable', p. 63



argues, because 'no purpose-built urban training site and no simulation for many years to come will be able to present the heterogeneity and complexity of a modern megalopolis'. Nevertheless, this remains the aim. The Report's most ambitious suggestion is for the construction of a 20 x 20 km 'mega-MOUT' complex, incorporating a complete 900-building town, at the Twentynine Palms Marine base in the California desert.<sup>18</sup> Costing \$330 million by 2011, such a complex would allow an entire brigade to simulate taking a large Iraqi town, including port and industrial facilities, with unprecedented levels of realism. For the first time, air power could be integrated with ground forces, and live artillery fire would be possible.

### *Virtual Baghdad*

Electronic simulation technologies blend seamlessly into these physical constructions. In the 'Urban Terrain Module' at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, a one-house space decorated in 'Middle-Eastern' style is embedded within a media studio, which can project digitally generated 'virtual humans' with suitably swarthy 'Arab' features onto special screens inside the house. The project's designers argue that the simulations at Fort Sill, built with the help of Hollywood professionals, are so convincing that the borders between the virtualized and physical elements are increasingly indistinguishable to US soldiers training there. In the near future they hope the environments will be modified to project digital mapping data from Iraq or other urban war zones, so that troops could rehearse 'on the actual terrain that they would occupy someday—maybe in a future theatre of war'.<sup>19</sup>

Beyond these 'hybrid' or 'mixed reality' simulations lies a universe of purely computerized ones. In these, electronic mapping and satellite-image technologies of cities that US troops are about to attack or occupy are used to provide digital renditions that can be experienced 'immervsely'. In 2004, the Computer Science Corporation combined satellite and laser-scanned imagery with digital pictures from the ground to 'build' much of Iraq, including all the major cities, into a 'virtualized reality' model, accurate to within one metre. This apparently allows trainees

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<sup>18</sup> RAND, 'Preparing for the Proven Inevitable', pp. 83, 152.

<sup>19</sup> Heidi Loredo, 'Hollywood magic prepares Marines for combat', *Marines.Com*, July 2004.

to 'drive' from Kuwait to Turkey via real-time models during war games. Entirely lacking in even virtual people, these simulations render Iraq as pure digital battlespace. The virtual models have such an impact on troops that CSC has to warn: 'if you put a door on the side of the building, the soldier is trained for that. If he gets to the real environment and the door is on the wrong side of the building, he can get killed.'<sup>20</sup>

Much larger urban simulations are used for the war-gaming activities by which US defence planners map out future combat scenarios. For one of these, an 8-square-mile swathe of Jakarta that includes 1.6 million buildings has been digitized and 'geo-specifically' simulated in three dimensions. It includes over a hundred thousand 'vehicles' and 'civilians', with their daily rhythms mapped in virtualized real time: roads are relatively empty at night, but clogged with vehicles during rush hours; 'traffic and civilian presence increases around mosques at the appropriate times for daily prayers'. Known as 'Urban Resolve', the simulation has used some of the US military's most sophisticated supercomputers to project American forces into a full-scale war in the Indonesian capital in 2015. The same technology is now being adapted to provide a virtualized rendition of Baghdad.<sup>21</sup> One aim is to keep these computer simulations of urban battlefields constantly updated, using combat patrols to report back on the latest destruction wrought by artillery or aerial bombardment.

### *Army of gamers*

The 'military-industrial-entertainment-media complex' has played a central role in naturalizing the idea that American and allied forces should be pitched in battle against the inhabitants of Arab and Third World cities.<sup>22</sup> The two most popular video game franchises in 2005 were *Full Spectrum Warrior* and *America's Army*, developed respectively by the US Marines and the Army. Both games centre overwhelmingly on the task of occupying stylized Arab cities. Their immersive simulations work

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<sup>20</sup> Quoted in Harrison Donnelly, 'Geospatial data bolsters virtual training', *Military Geospatial Technology*, vol. 4, no. 4, 2006

<sup>21</sup> See Peter Wielhouwer, 'Preparing for future joint urban operations The role of simulation and the *Urban Resolve* experiment', *Small Wars*, July 2005.

<sup>22</sup> James Der Derian, *Virtuous War Mapping the Military-Industrial-Media-Entertainment Network*, Boulder, CO 2001.

powerfully to equate these environments with 'terrorism' and to stress that they need 'pacification' or 'cleansing' by military means.

These video games also demonstrate the extent of the American entertainment industry's commitment to 'a culture of permanent war'.<sup>23</sup> Unsurprisingly, when the city's inhabitants appear in these games they are portrayed, almost without exception, as the shadowy, racialized representation of 'the terrorist'—figures to be annihilated in a blurred combination of military training and entertainment. In *America's Army*, the fictional country of 'Zekistan' features stylized Islamic architecture; buildings are either dark and menacing, or else in flames. Here again, the only role for Arab cities is as a terrain for urban war. Complex and self-reinforcing connections between war and entertainment in the digital age deepen the long-established role of films and toys as outlets for militaristic propaganda. An estimated 90 per cent of the 75,000 men and women who join the US Army each year are 'casual' video-gamers; 30 per cent consider themselves 'hardcore'. Such is the familiarity of most military recruits with Playstation controls that the US Marines have even mimicked these in the consoles for their new remote-control urban-surveillance vehicle, Dragon Runner, currently being used on Iraq's streets.<sup>24</sup>

The extent to which US military managers have preferred to inhabit virtualized Arab cities, rather than confront their social realities, is reflected in the treatment of the increasing numbers of US Iraq war veterans suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. The University of Southern California's Institute for Creative Technologies, a major player in the crossover between war and entertainment, has adapted *Full Spectrum Warrior's* immersive simulations of Arab cities as the basis for treating traumatized soldiers. Patients are forced to go through recreations of the events that have distressed them most: being inside mined or bombed vehicles or helicopters, sitting out mortar attacks on their compounds, or coming under attack while patrolling Iraqi streets. This allows the war-zone experience to be replayed in what is called 'Virtual Iraq Exposure Therapy', due to be extended to treatment centres across the United States. The video-game features of the 'therapy' are deemed by its designers to 'resonate well with the current generation of war fighters',

<sup>23</sup> Andy Deck, 'No Quarter: Demilitarizing the playground', Artcontext website, 2004.

<sup>24</sup> Noah Shachtman, 'Why War Is Really Just a Game,' *Wired*, 24 May 2002.

although one Navy psychologist stressed that it was important to make sure that the simulations were 'not too realistic', since that might 'create more trauma'.<sup>25</sup>

### *Alien homelands*

The complex constellation of urban-warfare simulations discussed here work most powerfully as a collective. Their various physical, electronic and hybrid manifestations operate, as do all simulations, by collapsing the real with the artificed, to the extent that any simple boundary between the two disappears.<sup>26</sup> One effect, as we have seen, is to naturalize Arab and global-South cities as little but physical battlespace, populated, when peopled at all, by dehumanized and racialized 'terrorists' that must—necessity is one of the rules of the game—be erased by Western, or Israeli, military intervention. At the same time, the militaristic gloss and relentless sanitization serve to produce an ideological reinforcement and subliminal legitimization of US foreign-policy imperatives.

A further dissolution of boundaries takes place in the piloting of the armed Predator drones that are increasingly used in the US and Israeli surveillance and assassination strikes, from Lebanon and the Occupied Territories to Afghanistan and Pakistan. The American 'pilots' of these machines are actually located in an anonymous trailer complex at Nellis Air Base, on the edge of Las Vegas. They fly combat sorties without ever leaving their desks. 'At the end of the work day', their commanding officer explained, 'you walk back into the rest of life in America'.<sup>27</sup>

In fact, the urban war-zone images produced by the simulacral collective speak just as much to the fragmenting landscapes and racialized politics of America's cities. In addition to a simulated 'Middle East', US defence planners' programmes continue to factor in mock-ups of American city districts, in which law-enforcement and National Guard personnel undertake operations against civil unrest, terrorist attack and natural disaster. US military simulacra still focus on Los Angeles as well as on Baghdad, planning major operations to re-take American cities

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<sup>25</sup> See Rick Rogers, 'Military to try virtual combat stress remedy', SignOnSanDiego Com.

<sup>26</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*, Bloomington 1991.

<sup>27</sup> Quoted in Richard Newman, 'The joystick war', *US News*, 19 May 2003.

from uprisings or social protests.<sup>28</sup> The Los Angeles riots of 1992 appear on military urban-warfare Powerpoints about 'lessons learned' just as often as Grozny or Mogadishu. Responding to the devastation of New Orleans, one US Army officer talked openly about the need to launch urban-combat operations to 'take back' the city from 'insurgents' who were purportedly breeding anarchy and violence there, in an echo of the language used about Fallujah or Baghdad.<sup>29</sup> Attitudes of military and law enforcement personnel towards crises in American cities seem strongly influenced by 'urban operations' in the Middle East.

Urban-war simulations help to demonstrate the shifts in US military doctrine in much more explicit form. Pentagon theorists no longer concentrate so exclusively on a planetary battlespace, over which the networked power of US air and space platforms rules supreme: instead, they have turned their attention to the spaces of the global South. In addition, as Eyal Weizman has emphasized, both Israeli and Western military planners now stress the need not just to occupy, but physically to reorganize the space of colonized cities, so that high-tech weapons and surveillance systems can work to their best advantage. Weizman calls this 'design by destruction'. As he puts it: 'contemporary urban warfare plays itself out within a constructed, real or imaginary architecture, and through the destruction, construction, reorganization and subversion of space'.<sup>30</sup>

Thus, as in Iraq, neighbourhoods can be wrapped in razor wire, circled by biometric checkpoints and turned into de facto ghettos or camps—looking much like Palestinian villages. Areas deemed to be too dense and complex to be penetrated by the gaze of drones, satellites and aerial targeting can be physically bulldozed, as was Jenin in 2002. The infrastructural systems that sustain the life of cities can be destroyed—as

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<sup>28</sup> Military simulacra also feature more directly in the fortunes of US cities. Their generation now involves important swathes of the US economy, especially in high-tech metropolitan areas. Local economies such as Orlando, Florida or the beltway in Virginia are now dominated by simulation corporations that blend military, research and entertainment dimensions. In Orlando alone there are around a hundred military-simulator firms which generate some 17,000 jobs, and are starting to rival Disney as a local economic force.

<sup>29</sup> Joseph Chenelly, 'Troops begin combat operations in New Orleans', *Army Times*, 2 September 2005.

<sup>30</sup> Phil Misselwitz and Eyal Weizman, 'Military operations as urban planning', in Anselm Franke, ed., *Territories*, Berlin 2003, pp. 272–75.

in the urbicidal assaults on Iraq in 1991 and Lebanon in 2006—or manipulated, to coerce resistant populations and political leaderships into surrender through the forced immiseration of enduring urban life without sewage systems or electricity; Gaza is, of course, the most notorious instance. Once again, Israel provides the most influential paradigms for the new trends in Western urban warfare.

Intimately tied to the entertainment industries, this mimetic collective labours to produce the digital streets and immersive cityscapes of the Arab world as America's 'other'. The key to these increasingly detailed environments is, of course, the radical denial of the social and cultural worlds, and lived urbanism, of these cities. The inculcation of racialized aggression works rather to obliterate understanding of the real places, and bodies, destroyed by military assault. It is widely recognized that the crude behaviour of the invading Anglo-American forces—search-and-destroy raids, arbitrary arrests, opening fire on demonstrations—was an important factor in stimulating the resistance in Iraq.<sup>31</sup>

As the occupation of Iraq enters its fifth year, American forces still control only a small fraction of Baghdad. At the start of 2007, Patrick Cockburn reported, US troops with accompanying Iraqi units 'tried to fight their way into Haifa Street, less than a mile from the Green Zone'. They had been attempting to capture exactly the same terrain in March 2005. In March 2007 Ban Ki-Moon's press conference announcing that the security situation in Baghdad had improved sufficiently for the UN to expand its presence was punctuated by a rocket attack on the heart of the Green Zone. 'Securing the city is a near impossibility', Cockburn argues. 'Sunni insurgents and Shia militiamen are too well-entrenched and, moreover, generally have more legitimacy in the eyes of Iraqis than government forces'.<sup>32</sup> The US soldiers still attempting to take Haifa Street four years after the invasion should recall Sunzi's advice: 'Know the enemy'. But if they did, of course, they would not be there.

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<sup>31</sup> See Patrick Cockburn, 'The Abyss in Iraq', NLR 36, Nov–Dec 2005

<sup>32</sup> Patrick Cockburn, 'Nowhere to Hide', *London Review of Books*, 22 February 2007.

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## REVIEWS

Jean-François Billeter, *Contre François Jullien*  
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HENRY ZHAO

### CONTESTING CONFUCIUS

Western scholarship on Chinese philosophy has long remained within its own small specialized ambit: a few scholars teaching a few students, so that the latter in turn may teach a few more students later on. They have constituted a rare species, which respectable universities have chosen to preserve. The subject appeared to have little wider relevance within these institutions, let alone outside. So it comes as quite a surprise to find a debate over traditional philosophy that has been raging in China for nearly a century suddenly blazing out within Western sinological circles, hitherto characterized by library quietness. It is even more astonishing to find the most famous sinologist in France so resoundingly condemned by a more senior fellow-sinologist, and in an eponymously titled pamphlet. If I were François Jullien, I should consider it an honour.

The passionate intensities that arguments over Confucian philosophy have generated in China had seemed unimaginable among those foreign scholars accustomed to watching the conflict with a marveling gaze, but always from a safe distance. Until now. Jean-François Billeter's pamphlet, *Contre François Jullien*, burns with the fire of indignation on almost every page. Billeter himself, born in 1939, is a French-Swiss scholar best known for his sociological study of the sixteenth-century rebel thinker, Li Zhi, in the context of the late Ming mandarinat, and for his works on the Daoist classic *Zhuangzi*. Billeter was responsible for establishing the Sinology Department at the University of Geneva, where he taught until his retirement in 1999.



Judging from this blistering text, however, he has not retired from intellectual life. Billeter's target, François Jullien, has had a more spectacular career. Currently professor of Chinese Philosophy at Paris University VII, Jullien is also a familiar figure in French public intellectual life: interviewed on his work by *Le Monde* and *Le Débat*; much in demand by businessmen and investors seeking 'an understanding' of China's multi-millennial culture—without which, they have been assured, it will be harder to turn a profit in the People's Republic of Confucius, Sunzi and Laozi.

Born in 1951, Jullien switched from studying Greek philosophy at L'École Normale Supérieure to Chinese studies in the early 1970s in the hope—as he has explained in numerous books and interviews over the past fifteen years—that Chinese philosophy would throw into question all the 'great universals' of European thinking. It had to be China because, for Jullien, this is the only historic culture to constitute Europe's 'great other': the Arabic and Hebraic worlds are 'closely connected to our own history. We are also linked with India linguistically, with only a few divisions between Greek and Sanskrit. In order to get away from Europe completely, China is the only choice: Japanese culture is only a variation.' There duly followed a spell in Shanghai and Beijing (1975–77) and a doctoral thesis on Lu Xun, the pioneering iconoclast of modern Chinese literature. From 1978–81 Jullien had an official posting in Hong Kong, and was based in Japan from 1985 until 1987. Since his return to Paris in 1989 Jullien has been remarkably productive: a book a year on average, amounting to 23 to date, the latest an almost immediate response to Billeter. The French press has met each new release with blanket coverage and generous approval. His books have been widely translated; four have appeared in Chinese and, interestingly, six in Vietnamese.

Jullien's first major work was *Process or Creation* (1989), a study of the seventeenth-century Confucian philosopher, Wang Fuzhi, whose writing Jullien dubs 'the thought of Chinese literature'. The book maps out the themes and the 'comparatist' method that he would deploy in all his later works; in this sense, his scholarship may be regarded as very consistent. Chinese thought is not only fundamentally different to that of Europe, Jullien argues, but often far superior to it. Thus by starting with the notion of 'process', rather than that of 'creation', Chinese philosophy dispenses with the cumbersome enigma of being and, therefore, with metaphysics. The book made his reputation as an ambitious and promising young scholar and, having dealt with God, Jullien moved on to art. In *Praise of Blandness* (1991) argues that the plainness treasured in Chinese aesthetics, even though it seems to betoken an 'absence of flavour', is in fact superior to any flavour as it is open to all potential variations, and even to a possible 'internal deliverance'. In aesthetics as in philosophy, China achieves an elegant victory over Europe.

In 1992 Jullien tackled another grandiose philosophical topic in *The Propensity of Things: Towards a History of Efficacy in China*. The character *Shi* is notoriously ambiguous—dictionary definitions include ‘power, influence, authority, strength; aspect, circumstances, conditions’—but Jullien’s interpretation is not made any easier by his translating it as ‘propensity’, a term he borrows, tellingly, from Leibniz. The following year, his *Figures of Immanence* offered ‘a philosophical reading of the I-Ching’, ‘the strangest of all strange books’. Once again, Chinese immanence is pitted against Western transcendence, and wins the match. The *Book of Changes*, Jullien claims, is in sharp contrast to European thinking because it creates an understanding of the world without recourse to mystery or abstraction, whereas European thought is focused on being, or on God. Once again, however, the superiority of early Chinese philosophy is elucidated by Jullien’s very free interpretation of it, via Hellenized or Europeanized terms. This is paradoxical, since his avowed intellectual strategy is ‘to take China as a detour to access Greece’. Indeed his next big (400-page) book, *Detour and Access: Strategies of Meaning in China and Greece* (1995), is an explicit attempt at this. It examines the earliest Confucianist and Daoist classics—the *Analec*s, Mencius, Laozi, Zhuangzi—and discovers that they share a common characteristic: an indefinite form of discourse, which refuses to tackle essentialist universalities but instead integrates all possible perspectives, so as to develop diversity. This ‘detour’ takes us to the point furthest removed from the Greek *logos*, which we can now ‘access’—and find to be particularly ‘abstract and stagnant’ by comparison. Both the argument and the conclusion are typical of Jullien’s work.

In a particularly productive year, Jullien published a second book in 1995, a *Dialogue on Morals*, featuring an imaginary debate between Mencius and an Enlightenment philosopher; the latter is a confection of Jullien’s, an unlikely combination of Pascal, Rousseau, Schopenhauer and Kant, and it will come as no surprise to learn that he is worsted by the sage. Turning from ethics to political and military philosophy, Jullien’s *Treatise on Efficacy* (1997) finds that, in war or diplomacy, Westerners (Aristotle, Machiavelli, Clausewitz) are clumsier operators than the Chinese (Sunzi, Hanfeizi, Guiguzi), who see effectiveness as primarily achieved by non-action whereas the former apparently rely on ‘consumption to overcome resistance’. His 1998 work, *A Sage Has No Ideas*, is the most widely translated of Jullien’s books. Chinese thinkers use wisdom, he argues, but not ‘ideas’, whereas Western philosophers work through abstraction and construction. The Chinese accept reality as nature provides it; any abstract idea is thus a prejudice against nature. The sage therefore avoids these, while the Europeans merely distance themselves from true philosophy.

Jullien returned to aesthetics in 2000 with *The Impossible Nude*, which renders the ‘absence of flavour’ that he explored in *Blandness* more tangible.

Nudity has always existed in Western culture, yet it is almost completely absent in Chinese art. These degrees of body covering warrant a further philosophical comparison, which leads Jullien to conclude that nakedness is an exposure of the present; the Chinese approach, by emphasizing the absent, opens up a 'sensual access to ontology'. In 2003, *The Great Image Has No Form* showed Western art to be obsessed with overcoming the 'objectivity' of the object, and thus constantly chasing the ghost of reality. Chinese art, by contrast, does not limit itself to the appearance of the object; the 'great image' refuses resemblance and thus avoids becoming a partial image, imprisoned in a static form.

The above-mentioned are just a selection of Jullien's books to date. To the charge of eclecticism, he breezily admits (in *Le Débat*, for example) that his work may appear 'discontinuous': strategy, blandness, morality, etc. But these are 'angles from which to return to the central question about the prejudices of European reason generally. Not being able to take on the latter forthright, I was left with only one possibility: to run from one point to another in order to weave a kind of problematic *network*.' In each book he manages to come up with a couple of catchy phrases, neat in French at least, to make Chinese philosophy seem appealingly different yet understandable; and not only superior to that of the West but highly illuminating to Westerners. Doubt naturally arises in one's mind: why is it, if Chinese thought is so much better than that of Ancient Greece or any other civilization, that some Chinese themselves fail to see that theirs is the greatest culture in the world? Just to say that it is because China is not 'the other' to China is not enough.

This is where Billeter comes in. His counter-blast identifies Jullien as the latest in a series of European writers who have founded their work on the myth of China's absolute otherness. Billeter cites Victor Segalen, Marcel Granet, Richard Wilhelm and Pierre Ryckmans, for whom China also constitutes 'the fundamental other'. But the origins of the myth can be traced back to Voltaire and the 'sinophile Enlightenment' of the eighteenth century. Voltaire and the *philosophes*, of course, used China as a foil, to represent the opposite of the regime they were fighting against at home. Jullien, Billeter claims, has taken this myth and updated it to the present, while at the same time hiding its political significance. This is the core of his argument. For Voltaire and his contemporaries founded their vision of China on the picture provided by their enemies, the Jesuits, who themselves had a keen material interest in painting a favourable picture of Imperial institutions and the Confucianism that structured them, since they hoped to convert the Empire from above, through the person of the Emperor. It was Confucianism, they explained, that constituted the astonishing 'key to the vault of the intellectual universe of the mandarins'. The Jesuits, for Billeter, are the originators of this myth of the marvellous Chinese 'other', of which

Jullien is the latest propagator. The crux of the matter, Billeter argues, lies in understanding the political uses of Chinese philosophy, both historically—as Imperial ideology—and in the present day.

Billeter gives a succinct account of the first process. During what has become known in retrospect as the 'first stage' of Confucianism, from the sixth to the third centuries BC, China was more of a geographical concept than a country, with numerous principalities and kingdoms confronting each other, in a situation akin to that of Ancient Greece; and as in Greece, different schools of philosophers competed for the ears of kings and princes, with Confucius (551–479BC) and the generations of disciples who succeeded him forming only one of the many schools. The first attempt to consolidate a Chinese empire under the Qin dynasty (221–206BC) was short-lived and ruthless; its rulers burnt all classic texts with the exception of Legalist works. From 206BC the second attempt, under the Han, adopted a different approach. Han ministers-cum-court-philosophers reconstructed 'pre-Imperial' Confucianism, as Billeter calls it, into a set of cosmological and moral doctrines. The mandarin state was badly in need of a philosophy that could serve as ideological support to the new-born Empire. Mingling it with, and so disguising, the brutally coercive 'Legalism' of the previous era, the Han mandarins thus launched the 'second stage' of Confucianism.

These early ideologues were so successful that the imperial institutions their philosophy helped to sustain persisted in China for over two thousand years, before finally collapsing in the early twentieth century. 'What we today regard as "Chinese civilization"', Billeter concludes, 'is closely linked to imperial despotism'—in contrast to Greek philosophy which, apparently unconnected to any form of despotism, has served as the source of the 'political freedom and democracy that runs through European history'. In China, however, even seemingly pure philosophical concepts such as *Zhongyong*—usually translated as 'golden mean', but which Jullien calls 'regulation'—were originally proposed to imperial officialdom as a technique of rule, Billeter argues.

The succeeding stages of Confucianism have been equally political. During the Southern Song and the Ming dynasties, from the twelfth to the seventeenth century, a number of scholars influenced by Buddhism and Daoism contributed to the more sophisticated development of Confucian philosophy. This revival is often referred to as the 'third stage', or—in the West—as Neo-Confucianism. From 1644 however the emperors of the Manchu dynasty, anxious to legitimate their ethnic-minority rule, resorted to a more conservative brand of Confucian ethics, turning it into a kind of fundamentalist dogmatism. After China's traumatic nineteenth-century encounter with Western military and cultural invasion, Confucianism was widely regarded as the major obstacle to China's modernization. Yet in the second half of the

twentieth century it has experienced several attempts at resurrection. These efforts, known as New Confucianism—*Xin Ruxue*—are often referred to as the 'fourth stage'. Billeter is on strong ground, then, when he attacks Jullien's airbrushed, depoliticizing account.

Billeter also has little difficulty demolishing Jullien's philosophical claims, pointing out the 'missed encounter' in each of his works. Though Jullien purports to engage with a different philosophical tradition, he never lets any of its representatives speak: there are few direct quotations or close readings of primary texts and he provides no full contextual accounts of the thinkers he mentions. Instead, his technique is to cherry-pick discrete notions as a thematic focus, presenting a homogenized account of the whole philosophical landscape in China. Jullien also entrenches the myth of China's otherness through his method of translation. Concepts such as *Dao* or *Shi* cannot simply be plucked from their contexts, and rendered by some New Age approximation. To translate *Dao* as 'process', as Jullien does, is a misnomer that succeeds only in impressing the layman. Jullien the sinophile is accused of betraying what is truly Chinese. Rather than focus on particular words one must translate the whole context, Billeter argues, and this is only possible if one starts from the assumption of shared human experience and an understanding of basic 'commonalities'. The Chinese might not, Billeter argues, have such a high opinion of their ancients because, paradoxically, they are 'free and responsible people' who might not have enjoyed despotism that much. To counter Jullien's Hellenization of Chinese concepts Billeter tries to describe the Chinese as 'people among us', thus making their philosophy politically comprehensible.

Following his account of the remodelling of early Chinese philosophy as imperial ideology, Billeter discusses the intellectual ferment that attended its downfall. In some respects these are the most interesting passages in his book, for the attitudes of the Chinese who live in the real rather than the sinological world can shed some light on these complicated issues. According to Billeter, in the early decades of the twentieth century the modern Chinese intelligentsia of the May Fourth generation split into four factions over their attitude to traditional Chinese thought. Radical iconoclasts (like Chen Duxiu, founder of the Communist Party) reject it completely; critical intellectuals (like Gu Jigang, the liberal-sceptic historian) question its 'sacred' source; comparatists (like Feng Youlan, author of the first history of Chinese philosophy) try to compare it to Western philosophy; purists (like Qian Mu, a Confucianist educator) insist that it is simply incomparable, as well as incommunicable to the West.

The four factions can actually be divided into two camps: the critics and the apologists. Among the latter, both the comparatists and the purists, though differing in approach, arrive at the same conclusion: Chinese superiority.

Jullien, according to Billeter, is a typical comparatist and, like his Chinese counterparts, unfailingly concludes that Chinese philosophy far surpasses all other varieties. Both critics and apologists have successors among younger generations of scholars in modern China, and the confrontation, instead of petering out over the years, has become even more heated, especially after China's economic take-off. Billeter cites the examples of two younger scholars. Mou Zhongjian is today's purist; writing in archaic Chinese in his 2005 essay, 'The Grand Chinese Way', he declares that Western civilization has passed its peak, culturally as well as economically, and the twenty-first century will be China's. Li Dongjun, at Nankai University, represents the new iconoclasts. In her 2004 book, *The Canonization of Confucius and the Confucianist Revolution*, she argues that Confucianism as a system of representation still has a tenacious grip on the Chinese mentality and, despite the demise of the Empire a century ago, still leads its subjects to fulfil a 'duty of abnegation in favour of totality'.

Billeter calls for the demythification of China as a 'fundamental other'. The necessity to understand its philosophy as an imperial ideology is a political one: 'not in order to reduce the role it has played in history, but to determine the approach we want to take to it'. This becomes all the more urgent because, although 'in the past the Europeans and the Chinese lived apart, this ancient separation is no more. Today we are facing the same historical moment, and should act together and understand each other.' The myth of the other now deters mutual understanding between China and the West. This is the ultimate insult to Jullien, whose purported aim has always been to bring about this understanding. Billeter puts it bluntly: 'Those who endorse a critical reflection on the past in fact subscribe to political liberty and democracy, while the comparatists accommodate more readily to the state of power'.

The last chapter of *Contre François Jullien*, 'One Must Choose', calls for readers to take a stand. As Billeter's reviewer, I guess I am not allowed to refuse. But are these the only choices on offer? I would say that both Jullien's de-politicization of traditional Chinese philosophy and Billeter's insistent politicization, according to the 'universal' standard of modern liberalism—hardly a Greek thought, but rather a very recent European product—are highly problematic. The issue is not whether China is specific or universal; China is both, to a certain degree. But it is simply not to the benefit of the Chinese to be told again and again that their culture was (and is) so unique that it can actually cure the deadly Western disease. Such an attitude was popular in Voltaire's Europe and it might play well in Jullien's. But the fantastical otherness that Jullien so seductively depicts has worked to the detriment of the Chinese over the last few centuries, and there is no reason to believe that otherness is a preferable projection today. Chinese philosophy has to break out of its cold cocoon

of alterity to the West, regardless of how tightly Jullien and other comparatists have been wrapping it up with their claims for its supremacy.

To be fair, Jullien knows perfectly well where philosophy intersects with politics. If the discussion of Chinese modes of 'effectiveness' in his books has always been somewhat mystifying, to a Chinese reader at least, in his press interviews he has been more clear-cut. In a 2005 *Le Monde* interview, he explains that, in the spring of 1989, only the students and a minority in the Communist Party were in favour of democracy. The vast majority wanted the maintenance of order, which the CCP was best equipped to provide, so that they could carry on working hard and getting richer. The Chinese government had known how to regulate the explosive situation that followed the end of the Cultural Revolution and de-Maoization. In masterful fashion, Deng Xiaoping had deftly avoided being dragged into debates on his economic reforms, and instead pushed through a 'silent revolution' which has proved a resounding success. Jullien explains that the reason for Deng's triumph is because his strategic thinking was based on the Chinese notion of effectiveness. Even Jullien acknowledges, then, though not explicitly, that in China today, philosophy is political.

Indeed, it is arguably more political than ever. During the 1980s and 1990s there was a powerful movement for the 'revival of Confucianism', mainly fanned by Chinese scholars teaching in the United States, who proposed that a Confucianist work ethic, comparable to that of Weberian Puritanism, lay behind the spectacular success of capitalism in Far Eastern countries. Du Weiming at Harvard is the leading star of this movement. 'First of all', he argues, 'in Far Eastern countries there is a cooperation between a powerful economy and the State; and secondly, there is a coordination between democracy, elitism and moral education; and, lastly, there is a strong sense of team spirit, although an individual is also allowed to claim personal achievements'. Du frequently states that most of the companies in those countries are run on a family basis, and therefore more 'efficiently'—Jullien would be proud—than their Western competitors.

The 1990s 'revival' was, somehow, muffled by the Asian financial crisis that suddenly exploded in 1997 and spread rapidly along the so-called 'Dragon Path' (or Confucianist sphere of influence) from Singapore to South Korea and Japan, exposing the fragility of the economies and, in some cases, the political structures of those countries. In recent years, however, another movement, the *guoxue re* or 'native philosophy fever', has been sweeping mainland China like a prairie fire. Popularizers of philosophy have been turned into stars by state-run television, reminiscent of the evangelists in the United States in the 1980s. School students are made to learn Confucius by rote, without any requirement to understand or interpret him. In 2006 there were a series of efforts aimed at reviving popular interest in Confucianism.

In May, several internet giants sponsored the selection of 'national philosophy masters'; in July, publicity around a traditional 'Confucianist Primary School' in Shanghai caused great controversy; in September, a 'standard' Confucius statue and portrait were released internationally, and a large number of scholars signed a proposal to establish Confucius's birthday as an official 'Teachers' Day'. Many encourage students to burn incense and kowtow to the statue of Confucius before taking exams, rather than to Buddha, because the latter is not scholarly. A sound and wise suggestion. But these attempts to do more and more for Confucius are unending, and we shall definitely see many more of them prevail. Jullien may not have realized that his idealization of early Chinese philosophy could help to provide this 'fever' with an innocently apolitical veil.

The government's attitude towards the 'native philosophy fever' has been ambiguous. Though its founders were all iconoclasts, the Communist Party has 'opened up' since the early 1980s. China has discovered that globalization and international competition work in its favour. In fact, the CCP is now extremely sensitive to hints of economic protectionism and political isolationism on the rise in the United States, Europe and Russia. That is why it is not eager to see China 'turning inwards' itself. On the other hand, the government considers nationalist sentiment among the masses to be a unifying force which legitimizes its rule. Since the authorities are sitting on the fence, the 'fever' has been, until now, a more or less spontaneous movement among the masses and intellectuals, stoked by a newly found national pride among the populace, but only half-heartedly encouraged by the government. In Chengdu, the city where I have resettled, people gather in tea-houses on Sunday mornings to hear lectures on traditional philosophy, though I doubt they would want to hear ideological admonitions. But the 'fever' itself is, beyond doubt, ideological in its agenda, an attempt to fill the vacuum of values in modern-day China. Spurred by China's increased economic strength, the 'fever' will develop rapidly. This is why the issues Billeter raises are of such importance. Philosophical speculation on otherness, once pushed to an extreme, risks becoming dangerously attractive. Diversity can be encouraged without rendering difference into something unrecognizable, unreachable. When otherness is made into myth, it may serve neither those inside it nor those outside. This fiery debate among French-speaking sinologists is, we may hope, only the prelude to a fuller discussion on the price of keeping the other as the other.



Kirk Varnedoe, *Pictures of Nothing: Abstract Art Since Pollock*  
 Princeton University Press: Princeton and London 2006, \$45, hardback  
 297 pp, 0 691 12678 X

BARRY SCHWABSKY

## ABSOLUTE ZERO

'With a speed that still seems amazing', wrote Clement Greenberg some sixty years ago, 'one of the most epochal transformations in the history of art was accomplished': the arrival of abstract art. This was, in the eyes of Greenberg and many others, not simply one new possibility added to the rest, but the one that would inevitably come to dominate: an art uniquely answerable to 'the underlying tendencies of the age'. Today, the transformation seems less epochal. Artists, critics and theorists are more likely to point to Marcel Duchamp's discovery of the readymade than to the advent of abstraction as the really amazing transformative leap in art in the early twentieth century. Good abstract painting and sculpture is still being produced, it might be conceded, but only in the same way that, for Greenberg, 'good landscapes, still lifes and torsos will still be turned out' under the reign of abstraction. Step into the contemporary wing of any museum and you will see far more representational art, in the form of photographs, videos and installations—or even more or less traditional representational painting—than you will abstraction.

Has the great adventure of abstraction faded with the century that gave birth to it? If so, then we should at least be able to get a historical grip on the phenomenon. We are still far from having such a history at our disposal, but one might hope to find a contribution to it in a book with a title like *Pictures of Nothing: Abstract Art Since Pollock*. The volume itself is a glossy, heavy-weight production, with copious illustrations of the many works discussed. Its text has been transcribed from the 2003 A. W. Mellon Lectures given at the National Gallery of Art in Washington by the former chief curator of the Museum of Modern Art, Kirk Varnedoe. There is thus considerable

experience behind these lectures, and considerable institutional weight; the annual Mellon Lectures have produced some landmark, and often very popular, contributions to the literature of art, from Kenneth Clark's *The Nude* and E. H. Gombrich's *Art and Illusion* in the 1950s to Arthur C. Danto's *After the End of Art* and John Golding's *Paths to the Absolute* in more recent years.

Varnedoe himself was an energetic and highly influential figure in the American art world. A charismatic lecturer (and rugby player), he was born in 1946 to a wealthy family in Savannah, Georgia; his grandfather had been the city's mayor, his father a stockbroker. Varnedoe was educated at Williams College, which has produced an unusual number of today's prominent museum curators and directors (in his foreword, the National Gallery's director, Earl A. Powell III, recalls their encounters 'in the undergraduate classrooms and on the muddy playing fields' of the college); at Stanford, under Albert Elsen; and in Paris, studying Rodin. An early contribution was 'The Ruins of the Tuileries, 1871-1883', a social-historical account of Impressionism centred around the charred remains of the royal palace after the Commune. Varnedoe began curating while teaching in New York in the 1970s. His early exhibitions suggest an eye for undervalued artists and schools, such as the lesser-known Impressionist Gustave Caillebotte, or fin-de-siècle painting from Scandinavia. His collaboration with William Rubin at MoMA produced the contentious 'Primitivism' exhibition in 1984.

As Rubin's chosen successor, Varnedoe was named chief curator of painting and sculpture at the Museum in 1988. He opened the new decade with the massive 'High and Low: Modern Art and Popular Culture' (organized in collaboration with Adam Gopnik, who contributes a preface to *Pictures of Nothing*) and continued with major retrospectives of such post-war American artists as Pollock, Johns and Twombly. In 2001, already ill with cancer, Varnedoe stepped down from MoMA to take up a post at Princeton, where he devoted himself primarily to preparing the Mellon Lectures. Varnedoe must from the beginning have intended these as a summation of sorts. There is for this reason a terrible poignancy to what would otherwise have been the standard disclaimer issued at the start of the last lecture in the series, when he says, 'I am so painfully aware of how much has gone unsaid, and how much I would still like to say'; all the more so as he then goes on to quote Rutger Hauer's words in *Blade Runner*—'All those moments will be lost in time, like tears in rain. Time to die.'

For all that, there is nothing of the valedictory about Varnedoe's account of abstraction. He urges us to forget the 'wearisome habit' of always seeing ourselves 'at the end of something rather than possibly near the beginning', the way 'so many scholars and critics—and artists too—are accustomed to thinking that the party was over before they got there, and that everything has to be described in terms of the ruination of a former set of ideals'. In

fact, Varnedoe does not much like the extremism of abstraction's beginnings either, and seems most comfortable *in media res*. At the beginning of his first lecture, he explains that he will be speaking about the abstract art of 'the last fifty years or so' and that the payoff to this discussion would be an answer to the question, 'Why abstract art?' But there is something odd about the promise to offer an explanation for the existence of abstract art that has little or nothing to say about its originators—about what artists as geographically far-flung and ideologically diverse as Piet Mondrian, Kasimir Malevich and Arthur Dove might have had in mind when they began painting abstractly in the second decade of the last century. Varnedoe has little sympathy for the origins of abstraction; these amount in his view to 'a culture of crypto-religious, timeless certainties, associated closely with the new monolithic collectivism in society'—a breathtaking simplification that allows him to dismiss both the theosophical and the revolutionary aspirations of the pre-World War II abstractionists at once.

Strangely for a book whose subtitle cites Jackson Pollock, Varnedoe does not dwell for long on the great American Abstract Expressionist—nor has he much to add on Pollock's New York School colleagues, such as Rothko, Newman and de Kooning. Pollock seems to matter most for the way his art might be said to draw a line between abstraction's past and its future—the way it made what Varnedoe characterizes as 'the math-based, systemic art' of European Constructivists like Richard Paul Lohse look 'very retrograde' and thereby cleared the ground for the Minimalism of the sixties. (The admiration of arch-Minimalist Donald Judd for Lohse then becomes very hard to explain, however.)

Varnedoe is also drawn to Pollock as an excuse to air his annoyance with what he calls the art-historical left who believe, he claims, 'that Abstract Expressionism like Pollock's succeeded because of a CIA plot'. Varnedoe is thinking mainly of the critics Max Kozloff and Eva Cockcroft, who in 1973 and 1974 wrote about Abstract Expressionism as, in Cockcroft's words, a 'weapon of the Cold War'; and of the Canadian art historian Serge Guilbaut, who in 1983 published a book with an attention-grabbing title, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom and the Cold War*. Never mind that these writers never said anything as simple-minded as Varnedoe implies; for him, the real point is that Abstract Expressionism could never have been effectively used as propaganda because its meaning is just too indeterminate. Looking at Pollock, 'some are going to feel that this work is about savage energy, others about lyricism; some will think it dances, others that it explodes; etcetera, etcetera'. That abstraction is amenable to facile interpretation is beyond a doubt, even without Varnedoe's exemplification of it; but for him, its whole effort is to evade 'a monolithic social solidarity that would limit the potential meanings produced by the art.'

According to Varnedoe, the best American abstract art achieved its freedom by shedding the weight of ideas that burdens European art: Pollock, he says, offers 'a translation or extrapolation of Surrealism . . . that leaves behind the earlier style's ideological baggage and its metaphysical claims', and Frank Stella does the same favour for Constructivism. It does not seem to occur to Varnedoe that he is himself using this art as support for an ideology, namely the one that, in American political terminology, is called liberalism; that precisely in purporting to refute its usefulness as propaganda, he is making a sort of propaganda out of it.

Yet that art should be something of the order of propaganda or advertising is evident in the particulars of Varnedoe's taste. If he prefers a painting by Frank Stella to one by Josef Albers, this not only has something to do with his perception that the Stella painting is, one might say, manlier than the Albers—'powerful and aggressive' and 'as big as a man', in contrast to the 'demure', 'staid' work of Albers—but also that it is more attention-grabbing, that it is 'jazzy and bold': qualities one would seek in a billboard. But if the paintings are advertisements for individualism, will and contrariety, then such traits may be apt. Even Dan Flavin's typically austere, delicate fluorescent light sculpture can eventually be redeemed by turning 'loud and extravagant . . . indeed, *imperious*'.

In the wake of Abstract Expressionism, neo-Dada and Pop played up art's potential kinship with advertising for all it was worth. Varnedoe is fascinated by the way Pop artists and many others had such an easy time making fun of abstraction: Lichtenstein reproducing the pattern on the cover of a child's composition book and thereby making a visual pun on the look of a Pollock painting, for instance; or making a comic-book-graphic rendering of a big splashy brushstroke, of the sort one might see in a work by de Kooning; or painting the sole of a sneaker in a way that recalls the geometrical patterning in a Vasarely painting. Varnedoe seems to believe that such gags successfully puncture the pretensions of abstract artists—whether to the 'ineffable' and 'soulful', in the case of the American Abstract Expressionists, or to a 'radically democratic' visual Esperanto with European geometrical abstraction. Maybe, but more to the point is Lichtenstein's thinking about the relation between representation and abstraction: that abstraction is always representable because representation is always based on an abstract code. In a sense, for Lichtenstein, the early abstractionists were right to believe they had discovered the distilled essence of art—and for that very reason had to be wrong in believing that abstraction could mark a radically new beginning or offer any hope for transcendence. It was only ever going to be able to repeat the gist of what art and design had always already been.

Varnedoe's inclination to shrug his shoulders over questions of the definition of abstraction can be a problem. He cites Philip Leider's argument

that we should discriminate between 'abstract' art and what he called the 'literal' art of the Minimalists. He sees why the opposition between these two approaches was a crucial issue for the art of the sixties—why something 'noble, serene and ethereal, a lushly beautiful statement of humane values' such as an abstract painting by Morris Louis had to seem irreconcilable with 'a work that is intentionally dumb and banal, whose only virtue is its quiddity, its insistent "thereness"', such as a sculpture by Robert Morris, Carl Andre or Donald Judd. But he does not seem to grasp that, in proclaiming that 'the right choice . . . was to go for Morris, Andre and Judd', he is speaking of an art that has, so to speak, passed through abstraction and come out the other side, not back into an art of representation but to an art of things in themselves. Yet, neither 'pictures' nor 'of nothing', they are no longer quite what was understood as abstraction, and closer than most of the Minimalists ever intended to the heritage of Duchamp.

The things that interested the Minimalists were simple, almost identityless things—Carl Andre's railroad ties and copper plates. But even such simple objects have uses, histories, associations, so it is not surprising that the first Minimalist works were soon followed by ones that turned such associations into metaphors—among the examples Varnedoe cites are Joel Shapiro's tiny cast-iron houses—or that put the potential uses of things into operation, as Scott Burton's furniture sculpture does. Varnedoe insists that there are other disciples of Minimalism who hold fast to 'imageless abstraction', such as Robert Smithson and Richard Serra, but Smithson's 'non-sites' are rich with paradoxes about representation—they do not abjure it. In the case of Serra, it makes more sense to speak of abstraction: as Varnedoe says, he 'reintroduces the idea of composition' that Andre and the others had renounced. It is as if Serra were bending Minimalism back towards its abstract sources rather than falling easefully forward towards its surprisingly (and perhaps disappointingly) poetic future.

Looking back to his venerable predecessor as a Mellon lecturer, Varnedoe speaks of wanting to 'have an argument for abstraction as good as Gombrich's argument for illusionism'. Gombrich's history of illusionism explained how pictorial representation developed, but it never claimed to explain what gave the art that employed it aesthetic value; one might agree that representation had progressed between the time of, say, Giotto and that of Michelangelo, but this would not necessarily be to say that art had progressed. A strong component in the rise of abstract art was the desire to catch hold of this specifically *artistic* quintessence—the desire for an art that would be nothing but art, whatever that turns out to be. As Ad Reinhardt put it, 'The one object of fifty years of abstract art is to present art-as-art and as nothing else . . . making it purer and emptier, more absolute and exclusive.' Perhaps the unexpected lesson of abstraction is the discovery that this pure, unadulterated art cannot

be distilled, that art only ever appears as an admixture—with pedagogy, or personal emotion, or propaganda, or whatever.

Gombrich saw pictorial representation as involving a process of 'making and matching'—simple representational schemata could be continually compared with their real-life referents and modified to attain greater and greater verisimilitude. Abstraction, one might say, retains the schemata but eliminates the process of matching them to any referent. For the historian the problem arises that, without the matching, one no longer knows what impetus to development remains. There might be a process by which abstraction is gradually attained, but once that has happened, is there anything left but repetition? If not, one might be able to write a chronicle of the successive recurrences of abstraction, but not a history. For Reinhardt, this was precisely the point: 'The one direction left for fine or abstract art today is in the painting of the same one form over and over again', creating the proper art for what he proclaimed as 'the true museum's soullessness, timelessness, airlessness and lifelessness.'

Reinhardt, strangely enough, is never mentioned in *Pictures of Nothing*, perhaps because Varnedoe was unwilling to confront such an implacable vision of the static essence of abstraction. But rather than attempting to forge a view of abstraction as a project capable of development, he elides the problem by presenting it as a moment within the development of representation, the 'constant cycling between representation and abstraction, between drawing forms out of the world and adding new forms to it'. He traces, for instance, the employment of mirrors in sculpture, from a mirrored cube made by Robert Morris in 1965 to Jeff Koons's famous stainless steel *Rabbit*, 1986—from 'a neutral, formal element' to 'a symbol for the hard sheen and glamour of American consumer culture'. In such ways, he explains, 'abstract art, while seeming insistently to reject and destroy representation, in fact steadily adds to its possibilities.'

*Pictures of Nothing* is bound to disappoint anyone hoping for a strong response to the question, 'Why abstract art?' or 'What is abstract art good for?'—let alone an account of the project of representation in European art as good as that of Gombrich. Instead, as undoubtedly befits a writer whose credo is that 'works of art in their quirkiness tend to resist generalities', the book ends up as little more than a sequence of observations on works by a number of artists whose oeuvre Varnedoe considers of value, along with a few lesser figures whose limitations serve to set into relief the virtues of the chosen few. Gopnik's preface to *Pictures of Nothing* points to the similarities between Varnedoe's trajectory and those of Simon Schama, in history and art history, and Stephen Greenblatt's, in literature: from social-historical contextualization, to neo-Darwinian notions of change through individual variation, to the dissolution of cultural processes into myriad

particularities and micro-choices. But isn't the resistance of particulars to generalization one of the most platitudinous generalizations of all? One might be sympathetic to the idea that, rather than representing a single, developing project, abstract art is 'generated precisely from giving the greatest vent to those things that make us individually different and separate from each other', yet still wonder: why does Varnedoe's triumphant conclusion come so easily, and feel like such a let-down? Perhaps for the same reason that the 'modern, liberal, secular society' of which abstract art is, in his view, the emblem, seems swept by malaise even when it claims to have prevailed at the 'end of history'. From the Russian Futurists' 'Victory Over the Sun' onward, abstract art has been impelled by desires of a greater than individual scope—destructive and creative on a collective scale. If cultures still need these desires undreamt of by liberalism, then abstract art as a total project—or at least a more vivid memory of it than emerges in Varnedoe's pages—may have a future yet.



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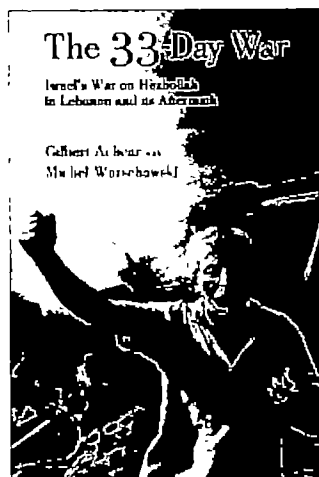
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CHRISTOPHER BROOKE

## LIGHT FROM THE FENS?

A scan of the archives suggests that the incidence of the phrase 'Enlightenment values' in what was once the British broadsheet press has roughly quadrupled in the wake of the terrorist attacks of September 2001. The term appears most frequently in articles discussing the challenge posed to Western societies by varieties of Islamic fundamentalism. On the whole, it is the more muscular liberals who are most keen on this particular political language, with its connotations of sturdy opposition to religious fanaticism. Such writers—broadly sympathetic to the hawkish foreign policy of the 'global war on terror'—might do well to combine their commitment to militant secularism with another, similarly authentic, 'Enlightenment value'. This is that sharp scepticism, widely shared among the *philosophes*, towards 'projectors' and their 'projects', grand schemes that possess a beguiling simplicity of design but which, as the *Encyclopédie* remarked, had been shown by the experience of centuries to be chimerical. The kind of 'project' that Montesquieu was keen to criticize included Louis XIV's aspiration towards universal monarchy; it is apt that in the pursuit of their disastrous quest to bring democracy to the Middle East by force of arms so many of the neoconservatives have organized themselves into the Project for the New American Century.

If the language of Enlightenment is increasingly being served up in contemporary politics, where it joins battle with the arguments about the nature and legacy of Enlightenment in the discourse surrounding postmodernism, that nature and that legacy are also being contested in a series of ambitious historical studies that have been published in recent years. Those who would multiply Enlightenments with reference to various national and sub-national contexts include J. G. A. Pocock, now in his eighties, whose series

on Edward Gibbon, *Barbarism and Religion*, already runs to four volumes with more to appear (as he wrote in the third instalment) in accordance with 'the interest of the public and the longevity of the historian'. Someone who insists by contrast that the idea of Enlightenment can be validly deployed across international boundaries is John Robertson, whose *Case for the Enlightenment* (2005) is a comparative study of the origins and development of a secular science of human betterment—usually known as political economy—in Scotland and Naples, two 'kingdoms governed as provinces'. The boldest of the arguments on behalf of a transnational Enlightenment, however, come from Jonathan Israel, whose 720-page *Radical Enlightenment* (2001) has just been supplemented by an even longer sequel, *Enlightenment Contested* (2006), with a promised and no doubt equally enormous third volume to take his project down to the time of the American and French Revolutions. Israel agrees with the early eighteenth-century Genoese scholar Paolo Mattia Doria, who judged that his age was dominated by a five-cornered struggle. In this contest, a conservative Aristotelian scholasticism, still propounded in universities and generally preferred by kings and clerics, wrestled, on the one hand, with three groups of moderate *moderni*, made up of the *Lochisti* (that is to say, followers of John Locke), the *Cartesiani-Malebranchisti* and the Leibniz-Wolffians; and on the other hand, with 'the awesome fifth column' (those are Israel's words) of the '*Epicurei-Spinosisti*' (those are Doria's). Israel's argument is that Spinoza and his clandestine followers, widely denounced as 'Epicureans', were those who were driving the most far-reaching transformation of intellectual life across Europe and beyond, laying the foundations for secular, democratic egalitarianism. This emphasis on the role of the Spinozists leads to his retrojecting the drama of Enlightenment to the half-century or so following Spinoza's early death in 1677, so that (Israel's words, again) 'even before Voltaire came to be widely known, in the 1740s, the real business was already over.'

*Radical Enlightenment* is a formidable scholarly achievement, as well as a gripping read, but not without its critics. If the radical assault on Christianity was over by the 1740s, Robertson suggests in *Case for the Enlightenment*, 'it was over because the authorities, Protestant as well as Catholic, had effectively suppressed it'. He argues that with more attention paid both to this clampdown and to the response it called forth from cautious, secular-minded intellectuals like David Hume, the traditional dating of the Enlightenment to the mid-eighteenth century and afterwards can be sustained. Other reservations include the suspicion that Israel is overstating his case, exaggerating the importance of the Dutch contribution—an understandable bias perhaps for someone who has been a Netherlands specialist for so many years—and collapsing too much into his general thesis about Spinoza and Spinozism. This emphasis on Spinoza has raised objections from those who insist on

the influential legacies of other heterodox writers like Thomas Hobbes and Pierre Bayle. In *Enlightenment Contested*, Israel explains why he regards Hobbes as less radical than, say, Richard Tuck suggests and less influential in the republic of letters than, say, Noel Malcolm argues; and he maintains that while Bayle was indeed of crucial importance for what followed, he was himself a closet Spinozist, and so is folded into the general thesis. (It is unlikely that his explanations will satisfy his critics.) The association of radical argument everywhere with Spinoza and Spinozism also provokes scepticism. Sometimes small radical groups may have developed their arguments from other, perhaps indigenous, sources, and, in Susan James's pointed turn of phrase (in a 2001 *Times Higher Educational Supplement* essay), 'to assimilate them all to Spinozism is to render a delicate and contoured language as flat as Holland itself.'

This, then, is some of the context in which the *Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Political Thought* appears. It is not, however, the context to which it properly belongs, owing to its exceptionally long period of gestation; the volume was planned in the 1980s, and was once supposed to have appeared in the 1990s. Much of the material is fresh, though not all of it: some of the chapters have already been published elsewhere, or are telescoped or otherwise reworked versions of contributors' well-known scholarship. The passage of time has also taken its toll. Richard Popkin died in 2005 with his chapter on scepticism, priestcraft and toleration only half completed, and one of the editors, Robert Wokler, died of cancer in July last year. It is good to record that he was presented with a copy of his *magnum opus* shortly before he died; the premature loss of his effervescent erudition to eighteenth-century studies is profound.

This is a book of Cambridge scholarship in a triple sense. The University Press has published the book, the penultimate volume to appear in its six-volume series; publication of the nineteenth-century volume, edited by Gareth Stedman Jones and Gregory Claeys, will complete the set. Second, the University has provided more of the contributors than other institutions: five of the twenty-four authors list a current affiliation with Cambridge; after that comes Sussex with three (a fair reflection of its importance to the study of modern intellectual history), while no other institution supplied more than one; and a number of the other contributors have Cambridge somewhere in their past, whether for a BA, PhD, College fellowship or University appointment. Third, the volume aims to exemplify the contextualist methods for studying the history of political thought associated with Cambridge in general and with Pocock, Quentin Skinner and John Dunn in particular. As the editors themselves put it in the very first paragraph, their goal for the volume was 'to provide as comprehensive a treatment as possible of eighteenth-century

political thought in the diverse historical contexts of the period, instead of a series of essays on our subject's acknowledged masters.'

To deliver this comprehensive treatment, the book is arranged in six Parts, each containing four chapters. 'The *ancien régime* and its critics' is a rather eclectic assortment on 'the spirit of nations', British politics, scepticism and toleration, and religion. Part II, 'The new light of reason', examines the use of comparative methods, the *Encyclopédie*, philosophical history and cultural anthropology. The third Part is devoted to arguments about the foundations of law, especially natural law; the fourth to political economy. Part V addresses 'the promotion of public happiness', covering enlightened despotism, cameralism, the reform of punishment, and republicanism. The final Part then turns to the revolutionary period, with chapters on America and France and a survey of the contemporary political scene in Britain; the volume is brought to a close with Wokler's own contribution on a classic Woklerian theme, the passage from Enlightenment political thought to modern social science.

The danger in large edited volumes is that the authors will supply rather flat survey chapters, and it is a sign of the strength in depth of this collection that only three or four fit this description. A large majority are valuable contributions, and a handful are excellent. Two of the chapters on Britain are very fine: Mark Goldie's conspectus of the languages of politics deployed around and against England's distinctive political institutions in the years after the (so-called) Glorious (so-called) Revolution; and Iain Hampsher-Monk's discussion of British radicalism and anti-Jacobinism at the century's end. The chapters on political economy are among the best in the book, and in the absence of up-to-date monographs on key figures like Archbishop Fénelon, Jean François Melon and Ferdinando Galiani these essays are doubly important. Istvan Hont's chapter on the course of the luxury debate down to the time of Saint Lambert's 1762 article for the *Encyclopédie* is superb, presenting two important correctives to received wisdom. First, Hont stresses that Bernard de Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees* was far more important as an argument against Fénelon's *Telemachus*, and its Jacobite admirers in Britain, than as the attack on Shaftesbury that Mandeville made it appear to be by the time of the 1723 edition. Second, he observes that there were really two separate debates about the uses and disadvantages of luxury, one between 'ancients' and 'moderns', but the other, more significant, taking place between 'the partisans of "unregulated" and "well-ordered" luxury' among the 'moderns' themselves; the question being 'not whether to accept modern economic growth, but how to make it politically and morally benign'. Tim Hochstrasser's chapter on French physiocracy, Keith Tribe's on German cameralism and Knud Haakonssen's on German natural jurisprudence also deserve to be singled out: each offers a learned and lucid

overview of discourses that are still frequently misunderstood, especially in the English-speaking world.

The chapters on the American and French Revolutions by Gordon S. Wood and Keith Michael Baker complement one another and build well on the volume's earlier contents, and it is instructive to read their treatments of the revolutionaries' difficulties with sovereignty and representation side by side. For the leaders of the American Revolution, the problem of sovereignty arose both with regard to the rights of elected legislatures (which they had become determined to restrain by the mid-1780s), and with respect to where sovereignty should lie in the proposed federal state. Thomas Jefferson identified the solution to the first problem in his *Notes on the State of Virginia* as that of 'render[ing] a form of government unalterable by ordinary acts of assembly', which would require 'special conventions to form and fix'. James Wilson in Pennsylvania formulated the enduring response to the anti-Federalist challenge on the second by locating that power 'from which there is no appeal, and which is therefore called absolute, supreme, and uncontrollable' in the (uninstitutionalized) people as a whole.

In France, the theoretical architect of the Revolution was the Abbé Sieyès, who first defined the Nobility and Clergy out of the nation in his *Essai sur les privilèges* of 1788, on the grounds that these Estates did no useful work; and then in *Qu'est-ce que le Tiers-Etat?* the following year excluded them again, for 'the general will . . . cannot be *one* as long as you retain three orders and three representations.' Against Rousseau's argument that representation was incompatible with genuine popular sovereignty, Sieyès maintained that a properly general will could only be formulated on a national scale through elected representatives deliberating in assembly, each acting as if representative of the entire nation, unrestrained by any *mandat impératif*. What is striking here is that both revolutionary states were thus founded on distinctively Hobbesian theoretical moves: Wilson's argument about the role of the people places Hobbes's thoughts about the sleeping monarch in the seventh chapter of *De Cive* right at the heart of American constitutionalism; Sieyès's claim closely shadowed Hobbes's argument in chapter sixteen of *Leviathan* about the intimate link between representation and sovereignty—with all the disempowering consequences that flow from that idea for the citizens themselves.

The outstanding individual chapter is Michael Sonenscher's 'Property, community and citizenship', the bland title disguising an engagement with the most radical politics of the period. On trial for his life in 1797, François Noël 'Gracchus' Babeuf made the counterintuitive claim that his arguments for a republicanism based on a system of common property were sustained by the writings of Rousseau, Mably, Helvétius and Diderot, whom he called 'those other levellers'. Sonenscher aims to elucidate how these four writers

could plausibly come to be read as providing support for Babeuf's political economy—with Morelly sometimes substituting for Diderot, whom Babeuf had mistakenly named as the author of the *Code de la nature*. Four key topics are identified for exploration: a needs-based conception of human society; a particular account of the progress of the arts and sciences; a certain take on the history of the Roman Republic's conflicts over property; and the opportunities provided by 'the modern funding system', which suggested ways in which the moderns might escape the fate of their ancient predecessors.

The puzzle in the case of Rousseau, to take just one of the four 'levellers', is that he adopted at least three positions antithetical to those Babeuf ascribed to him, rejecting any connection between the progress of the arts and sciences and improvements in the human condition in the *First Discourse*, insisting on the radical artificiality of human society in the *Second Discourse* (a view that placed him, as his early critics saw, close to Hobbes), and upholding the 'sacred right of private property' in the *Discourse on Political Economy*. But in the time between Rousseau's publication of these works in the 1750s and Babeuf's political career, the salience of these core commitments faded from view. Diderot himself had begun the work of neutering Rousseau's radicalism in 1765 with his article on 'Hobbism' for the *Encyclopédie*, which (in Sonenscher's words) 'reinstat[ed] the general society of all mankind as a way of checking the otherwise arbitrary character of sovereign power'. Rousseau died in 1778, and his disciples afterwards tended to emphasize the centrality of republican patriotism to his political thought, often passing it off as a natural sentiment, which on his own account it most certainly was not. Manoeuvres like these helped to create a perception that Rousseau had stood far closer to the ideas of some of those who were in fact among his sharpest critics, and the door was thereby opened for the revolutionaries' appropriation of his reputation, whether Jacobin or Babouvist. Babeuf, so often regarded as a forerunner—either of vanguard insurrectionism or egalitarian socialism—comes out of Sonenscher's masterly treatment as far more immersed in the mainstream of late eighteenth-century arguments in republican political economy than the historiography has hitherto tended to suggest, but no less interesting or complex a figure for that.

What, then, of the volume taken as a whole, rather than as a collection of individual chapters? Geographically, the book is overwhelmingly a history of English, Scottish, French and German political thought, with a revolutionary American appendage, and thus surely qualifies the editors' claim to providing comprehensive treatment of their subject. In stark contrast to Jonathan Israel's *Enlightenment*, the Low Countries keep a low profile. The familiar far-flung outposts of philosophy make their appearance—Kant's Königsberg and Vico's Naples—but there is little else from outside the core four countries. There are two pages on Ireland, a discussion of Jansenism on the far side of

the Alps and Pyrenees, and a short account of physiocracy in Italy, Spain and, interestingly, Bengal. The Enlightened despots, Catherine II and Joseph II, make their appearance, and there is a further brief discussion of Diderot's engagement with Catherine's Russia; there is an outline of the republican constitutions of Geneva and Venice, and that is about it. Furthermore, the thematic chapters are organized, often enough, by this limited geography, which inevitably means that some contexts get covered well while others are neglected. The chapters on Germany (natural jurisprudence, cameralism) and Scotland (natural rights, political economy), for example, convey a good sense of how political inquiry was institutionalized in the university cultures of these countries; the *Encyclopédie* gets a chapter of its own; and the British institutional setting is well described. But many contexts important for what we might call the infrastructure of political thinking are passed over: the salon culture of *ancien régime* France, or the worlds of the circulating journals; the political press, or the many clubs, from Benjamin Furl's Lantern Club in Rotterdam down to those of the French Revolution. One hesitates to criticize the editors for these omissions—quite enough has already been written about coffee-houses and politeness, to take just two of the sub-topics in the now-extensive literature on eighteenth-century institutions and practices of sociability—but for a volume which trumpets its concern with 'diverse historical contexts', there are more than a few that are conspicuous by their absence.

If some contexts are marginalized, some subjects also get nudged out of the way. The major discussion of European imperialism comes, curiously, in Melvin Richter's treatment of comparative methods in chapter five. Richter presents a few thoughts about Voltaire's opinions on empire and rightly gives space to the Abbé Raynal's important *Histoire des Deux Indes* (1770); but there is a lot more to say on the eighteenth-century arguments surrounding long-distance commerce and colonial expansion—another important eighteenth-century 'project'—some of which is said by Sankar Muthu in his admirable *Enlightenment against Empire* (2003). International political theory is neglected: there are some scattered remarks on ideas of international confederation (Andrew Fletcher, the Abbé de Saint-Pierre, Immanuel Kant), but almost nothing on arguments about the causes and conduct of wars. Slavery is invisible on most of this book's pages, most strikingly in the chapter on politics in America. There are a few lines on Diderot's anti-slavery writing and the briefest note on the place of slavery in the debates of the French Revolution; the only passage in the book that goes into any technical detail on the subject at all is a page on the building blocks of Christian Wolff's natural law philosophy. Women, too, are sidelined. A section of Goldie's chapter on Britain after 1689 is called 'the claims of women', but this turns out to be two pages on the Tory propagandist Mary Astell. Those women

who happen not to be monarchs are then substantially absent until the chapters on the radicalism at the end of the century, where we get a mention of Olympe de Gouges and a more extended discussion of Mary Wollstonecraft. Ten women receive an entry in the biographical appendix (Abigail Adams, Jane Barker, Isabelle de Charrière, Eleonora Fonseca Pimental, Mary Hays, Mercy Otis Warren, Catherine Macaulay, Mary Manley, Hannah More and Mme de Staël) but only the last four of these get a mention in the volume's main text. It is not much, and there is practically no consideration at all of eighteenth-century theorizations of the significance of gender for politics, beyond the remark that the French Revolutionary Convention 'also suppressed women's political participation in the name of a strictly gendered conception of republican virtue', which is true but insufficient. Perhaps the fact that the book was planned as long ago as the 1980s explains these various blindspots: it is impossible to imagine a similar volume neglecting these topics being assembled in the academy today, just as it would be difficult to imagine a similar collection being put together with only one woman contributor, Sylvana Tomaselli.

The editors can, on the other hand, claim success in their aspiration to avoid 'a series of essays on our subject's acknowledged masters', for only one chapter reads like an essay on a master—Donald Winch on Scottish political economy, which is really a chapter on Adam Smith. How are other major political thinkers dealt with? Sometimes they are given a substantial discussion embedded within a survey of a wider topic, so we get ten pages on Wolff in the chapter on German natural law, or a handful on Johann Heinrich Gottlob von Justi in the treatment of cameralism. The most important thinkers of all crop up in several places. In some cases, this works. Montesquieu makes his first appearance in Tomaselli's chapter on 'the spirit of nations', which he dominates. He then reappears in discussions of comparative methods, of his distinctive analysis of the British constitution, his treatment of the social contract motif, and luxury, with numerous brief mentions elsewhere. All things considered, we get a thorough treatment of his importance to eighteenth-century political argument, and his major works all receive some attention: *The Spirit of the Laws*, obviously, but also the *Persian Letters* and the *Considerations on the Causes of the Greatness of the Romans and their Decline*. In other cases, this parcelling-out treatment works less well. Rousseau receives his first extended examination in Patrick Riley's fine discussion of his social contract theory, but Iring Fetscher's survey of eighteenth-century republicanism then goes over much of the same ground again, and one result is that too much of Rousseau's most distinctive contribution is obscured from view. Indeed, it is ironic that this should be the case in a volume edited by Wokler, of all people, who did so much over the course of his career, starting with his doctoral dissertation, to draw attention to the extent to which Rousseau's ideas



about music and language were deeply woven into the structures of his political thought. The later chapters on revolutionary politics in France touch on what Rousseau was understood by a later generation to have said; but what he actually did have to say, and why it might have been important, has not been established across a broad enough front in what has gone before.

Where, finally, does the *Cambridge History* stand in the ongoing Enlightenment wars, with which we began? On the whole, the volume substantially ignores them. The contributors generally keep their heads below the parapet, avoiding the crossfire of general arguments about the overall character of eighteenth-century intellectual activity through dutiful concentration on their particular thematic assignments. Although the word is used from time to time, 'Enlightenment' doesn't even rate a listing in the index. The editors defend the coherence of treating the period with which their volume is concerned as a unity, but they also insist that it is not the job of their book to interrogate the terms for the various kinds of Enlightenment—whether Scottish, Counter- or just The. Rather, these 'need to be situated even more in the post-Enlightenment philosophical and political contexts which gave rise to them than with reference to the ideological currents they were introduced to define'. Wokler has elsewhere argued that if the Enlightenment was about anything in particular, it was an extended argument for religious toleration. The book clears a space for this perspective by indicating that the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685 can be considered as one of its starting points; as also through the division of labour between this book and its 1450–1700 predecessor in the Cambridge series, according to which Locke's *Two Treatises* are dealt with there, leaving the writings on toleration for consideration here. But it would be hard to make the argument that this volume gives any especially privileged place to the case for religious toleration. Goldie's pages on the subject, which complete the chapter that Popkin began, give space to descriptions of eighteenth-century writings against toleration, play down the contribution of sceptical notions in the toleration debates, and focus on the way in which 'arguments for toleration were broadly evangelical in nature', being concerned with 'the relationship of the church to the state within the context of the Christian duty to evangelize'. It is clearly correct to treat Locke's argument in these terms, but potentially quite misleading to assimilate Bayle to this 'evangelical' discourse. On this point I continue to prefer Israel's opinion (in *Enlightenment Contested*) that these 'two theories are actually totally different and incompatible, the first [Locke] Protestant, theological and limited, the latter [Bayle] entirely non-theological and universal'.

Wokler is also associated, however, with another pair of theses about the fate of Enlightenment politics that do get an airing in the final chapter, his own contribution on 'ideology and the origins of social science'. The

first thesis derives from Hannah Arendt, and contends that the French revolutionary nation-state:

joined the rights of man to the sovereignty of the nation, in a spirit profoundly at odds with Enlightenment cosmopolitanism, thereby giving warrant to modern nationalism by defining human rights in such a way that only the state could enforce them and only members of the nation could enjoy them.

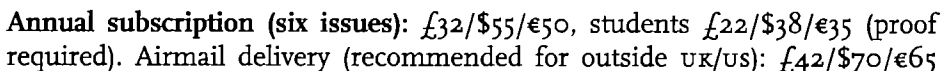
The second is broadly Foucauldian, drawing on the argument from *Les mots et les choses* about a *rupture épistémologique*, though insisting on 'a longer period of gestation' than Foucault's concept permits. '[I]t remains the case', Wokler writes:

that the transformation of the human sciences around 1795 . . . was marked by the removal of politics from the scientific scrutiny of human nature—by the elimination of the spheres of legislation and political action from *la science sociale* and their redescription as abstract, utopian, metaphysical, and, after the Terror, dangerous to know.

The Woklerian link between the two theses is once again the Abbé Sieyès, whose *Qu'est-ce que le Tiers-Etat?*, published in January 1789, is not only the founding text for the politics of the modern nation-state but also, remarkably, the first recorded instance of the term *la science sociale*. The editors' introduction says that Wokler's chapter seeks to 'lay a bridge to the series' next volume' on the nineteenth century, but insofar as it does this it is through marking a sharp separation between the intellectual world of the 1790s and what has gone before. This is a *cæsura* that Wokler has been keen to emphasize elsewhere in his arguments against those who see the post-Revolutionary intellectual and political world as a more or less uncomplicated outgrowth of eighteenth-century Enlightenment, and specifically against those who would hold that Enlightenment somehow responsible for the crimes of twentieth-century nation-states. 'Even if they were not positivists', the volume concludes, 'social scientists would henceforth be less interested in human rights than were their Enlightenment predecessors, and many socialists among them would in time come to follow Friedrich Engels in advocating the abolition or withering away of the state'.

Those who currently brandish 'the Enlightenment' in their contemporary engagements may want to consult this splendid volume in order to find out what kinds of arguments about political ideas were actually taking place amongst the eighteenth-century writers whom they so profess to prize. But many of today's partisans of 'Enlightenment values' probably have little desire to learn much about the complexities of the intellectual life of what is now a quarter of a millennium ago. The important thing for so many of these, one strongly suspects, is that Enlightenment has itself become a Project.

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# NEW LEFT REVIEW 45

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*Special Issue on Globalization and Biopolitics*



## ARTICLES

MALCOLM BULL	Vectors of the Biopolitical	7
JOHN CHALCRAFT	Levantine Labour	27
SANJAY REDDY	Death in China	49
KAUSHIK SUNDER RAJAN	Experimental Values	67

## POLEMIC

CLIVE HAMILTON	Building on Kyoto	91
GEORGE MONBIOT	Environmental Feedback	105

## ARTICLES

SVEN LÜTTICKEN	Unnatural History	115
JANE BENNETT	Edible Matter	133

# PROGRAMME NOTES

## MALCOLM BULL: Vectors of the Biopolitical

Taking coordinates from Aristotle, Malcolm Bull finds in Agamben's biopolitics and Nussbaum's capabilities approach the disconnected fragments of a lost vision of society, adumbrated by Marx, glimpsed and rejected by Arendt. Strange meetings as the trajectories of the disenfranchised and the empowered, human and non-human, converge.

## JOHN CHALCRAFT: Levantine Labour

Against celebrations of the messianic potential of migrant labour, John Chalcraft presents the case of Syrian workers in Lebanon, where porous borders and hybrid identities serve to reproduce exploitative conditions. What motivations and aspirations underpin migration—and what routes might lead out of commodification's web?

## SANJAY REDDY: Death in China

Does the PRC's staggering economic growth confirm the thesis that 'wealthier is healthier'? Using life expectancy data from three decades, Sanjay Reddy measures China's advances against those of other countries—and finds explanations for its relatively poor performance in the marketization of health care and shrinkage of state spending since 1980.

## KAUSHIK SUNDER RAJAN: Experimental Values

Drawing on fieldwork in India, Kaushik Sunder Rajan analyses the mechanics of global pharmaceutical trials. The outsourcing of drug testing not as neo-colonial plunder, but part of a dual dynamic, under the aegis of 'biocapital': expropriation of Third World subjects, exploitation of medicated populations in the First.



### CLIVE HAMILTON: Building on Kyoto

A critical assessment of George Monbiot's scheme for a 90 per cent cut in carbon emissions. Given the psychological grip of capitalist consumption patterns, and the forces blocking attempts to tackle climate change—fossil fuel lobby, heavy industry, airlines—what is the best strategy for environmental action? Can ambitious targets and moral exhortations bring any improvement on existing treaties?

### GEORGE MONBIOT: Environmental Feedback

Responding to Clive Hamilton, George Monbiot stresses the inadequacies of current governmental efforts to address rising global temperatures, and the need for targets to be set by science rather than political expediency. An attack on the cruelties of cost-benefit analysis, and a call for genuine ethical commitment to replace tokenism.

### SVEN LÜTTICKEN: Unnatural History

Do increasingly dark ecological portents indicate a deeper transformation of nature itself? Sven Lütticken elaborates a historicized conception of nature, seeking precedents and contrasts in 19th- and 20th-century philosophies and fictions. Dinosaurs and overmen, *Geist* and entropic decline in Verne, Nietzsche, Schelling and Smithson.

### JANE BENNETT: Edible Matter

Jane Bennett presents a case for seeing matter as actant inside and alongside humankind, able to exert influence on moods, dispositions, decisions. Might food in fact be seen as possessing a form of agency? Vitality and volition in motifs from Thoreau and Nietzsche, viewed through the prism of the biological and physical sciences.

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# Globalization and Biopolitics

## *Introduction to New Left Review 45*

A SELECTION OF the most pressing political questions of the moment might include the following: should women wear headscarves? May we buy and sell our bodily organs? How can we control the weather? The questions sound almost frivolous, and they are certainly not matters on which the canonical texts and traditions of political theory give much purchase. (What is a conservative position on the *hijab*? A socialist view of organ harvesting? A liberal policy on climate change?) That such issues should simultaneously be among the most debated of our time suggests a fundamental transformation in the landscape of politics.

The change is the result of technological advances that have enhanced our ability to travel, communicate and modify ourselves and our environment, yet the specifically political challenge posed by these developments comes from their global reach, and their widely differing impact on diverse populations. A few years ago, the issues arising from this transformation were routinely subsumed under the rubric of globalization, which, for both its proponents and detractors, hinged on the relationship between the global and the local. Now, many are considered biopolitical in the sense that they are produced through interactions of political power with the private and the corporeal. Almost imperceptibly, globalization has become biopolitics, the pivot between the two 9/11 and the global state of emergency known as 'the war on terror'.

The invitation to guest-edit a special issue of *New Left Review* offers the opportunity to explore the inter-relationships between these themes. Rather than allowing one to slide into the other, NLR 45 juxtaposes the two. Globalization and biopolitics need to be differentiated if we are to grasp the connections between them, and also to understand why the activism associated with the former has been transformed into the passivity characteristic of the latter.

Several of the articles that follow return to themes associated with globalization and its ambiguous import for human development. Though the 'war on terror' has had a devastating impact on participants and bystanders, for most people, as the sequence of articles by John Chalcraft, Sanjay Reddy and Kaushik Sunder Rajan reveals, the primary problem remains that of how to extract from the global economy the means to stay alive,

healthy and relatively autonomous. And, as 'Vectors of the Biopolitical' suggests, it is this practical project (as much as any state of exception) that draws people towards the public realm and makes life itself subject to the caprices of state and market.

Globalization collapses the distinction between public and private, and in the mutual interaction of nature and culture, private and public eventually dissolve as well. Sven Lütticken describes a world in which nature is transformed, while 'human culture is increasingly dominated by the new nature'; and the exchange between Clive Hamilton and George Monbiot highlights ways in which environmental feedback necessitates a politics that is at once more intimately personal and more globally consequential than any before.

Within the shadowy territory defined by the simultaneous interaction of public and private, nature and culture, new agents and forms of agency are becoming discernible. Jane Bennett sketches a public realm composed of 'a mortal assemblage of humans *and* nonhumans' in which agents work 'inside and alongside' one another. Chalcraft notes the role of what he suggestively calls 'fallen' agency, in which agents operate within the systems they seek to escape. One thread that emerges here is the idea that both globalization and biopolitics are coproductions—of opposing systems, incompatible objectives, agents animate and inanimate.

If climate change is the paradigmatic issue of the new politics, it is also a reminder that life is coproduced with death. Monbiot's suggestion that an airline steward should be sacrificed each time someone dies of hunger, and Hamilton's observation that for consumers solving climate change will mean experiencing a sort of death, are two sides of this; Reddy's meticulous analysis of diminishing gains in longevity in China another. The social equality potentially produced by 'the vectors of the biopolitical' is ultimately a matter of being equally alive and equally dead.

MALCOLM BULL

## VECTORS OF THE BIOPOLITICAL

*Man is by nature a political animal.*

*Aristotle, Politics*

FROM ONE SENTENCE in Aristotle derive two arresting theoretical discourses of the twenty-first century: Michel Foucault's biopolitics, provocatively reformulated by Giorgio Agamben in terms of the relationship between sovereignty and the body, and the capabilities approach developed by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum as a means of evaluating and promoting development, justice and freedom. Both are characterized by deep reflection on the sources of Western political thought, and by urgent engagement with contemporary social and legal problems. Both are in some sense biopolitical in that they are shaped by the interplay of the same Aristotelian categories—the human and the animal, politics and nature. But they are on opposite sides of the divide that has opened up in the human sciences since the 1960s, and there currently seems no optic through which they might simultaneously be viewed, no way of integrating or comparing their insights.

In part, this reflects a situation in which political debate appears to have fragmented into a multiplicity of single issues. The ancient 'Who will rule?' and the modern 'Who shall have what?' have been supplemented by an array of questions that deal with matters once exclusively cultural, personal or natural. For previous eras, the relative integrity and unmalleability of cultures, bodies and environments rendered such questions redundant. Now they frequently appear unanswerable from within established political traditions, and incommensurable in relation to each other.

Within this expanded field, biopolitics and the capabilities approach have unusual salience and potential, for both bundle together issues otherwise assumed to be distinct. If they, in turn, could be coordinated, perhaps we could begin to map the new territory.

### *Bare life*

In the introductory volume of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault remarked that whereas 'for millennia, man remained what he was for Aristotle: a living animal with the additional capacity for a political existence; modern man is an animal whose politics places his existence as a living being in question'. Rather than being an 'inaccessible substrate' presupposed by political life, the biological life of man had now 'passed into knowledge's field of control and power's sphere of intervention'.<sup>1</sup>

According to Foucault, this occurred through the development of the disciplines of the body and the regulation of the population. The first of these focused on the individual human body, increasing its usefulness and economic integration through 'the optimization of its capabilities'; the second on the collective body: 'births and mortality, the level of health, life expectancy and longevity' and the environmental variables that controlled them.<sup>2</sup> The result was that the animal life of man, far from being irrelevant to politics, now became its subject, 'a kind of bestialization of man achieved through the most sophisticated political techniques'.<sup>3</sup>

Taking his cue from Arendt, Agamben argues that political existence and bestialized life represent distinct types of being.<sup>4</sup> For the Greeks, he claims, *zōē* was the term for the natural life of nutrition and reproduction shared with other living creatures, while *bios* was used to describe ways of living a distinctively human life:

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<sup>1</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, tr. Robert Hurley, Harmondsworth 1984, pp. 143, 142.

<sup>2</sup> Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, p. 139.

<sup>3</sup> Foucault quoted in Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, tr. Daniel Heller-Roazen, Stanford 1998, p. 3; henceforth HS.

<sup>4</sup> 'The chief characteristic of this specifically human life . . . is that it is itself always full of events which ultimately can be told as a story, establish a biography; it is of this life, *bios* as distinguished from mere *zōē*, that Aristotle said that it "somehow is a kind of *praxis*". Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* [1958], Chicago 1998, p. 97; henceforth HC.

When Plato mentions three kinds of life in the *Philebus*, and when Aristotle distinguishes the contemplative life of the philosopher (*bios theōrētikos*) from the life of pleasure (*bios apolaustikos*) and the political life (*bios politikos*) in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, neither philosopher would ever have used the term *zōē* . . . to speak of a *zōē politikē* of the citizens of Athens would have made no sense.<sup>5</sup>

The difference between political life and the 'simple fact of living' is therefore grounded in the underlying distinction between *bios* and *zōē*. It is in this light that we must read Aristotle's assertion that although the *polis* 'comes into existence for the sake of life, it exists for the good life'.<sup>6</sup> The *polis* may have originated in the need to secure 'bare life', mere human survival, but that is no longer what it is for. Simple natural life 'is excluded from the *polis* in the strict sense, and remains confined—as merely reproductive life—to the sphere of the *oikos*, "home"'.<sup>7</sup>

From its inception, the fundamental binaries of Western political thought are those of 'bare life/political existence, *zōē/bios*, exclusion/inclusion'. The transition described by Foucault is therefore an event of world historical importance, and 'the entry of *zōē* into the sphere of the *polis* . . . the decisive event of modernity'. However, whereas Foucault understood the animal life of man to have become the subject/object of biopower primarily through the development of nineteenth-century discourses and disciplines of the body, Agamben posits an alternative source at the 'hidden point of intersection between the juridico-institutional and the biopolitical models of power'.<sup>8</sup>

Following Schmitt, Agamben argues that the sovereign is he who decides the exception, and reincludes within the law precisely what had been excluded from it, namely the state of nature. *Zōē*, not *bios*, is the form of life characteristic of the state of nature, so in the state of exception the sovereign effects the reinclusion of 'bare life' within the *polis*. Since sovereignty is exhaustively defined by its ability to decide the exception, it follows that 'the inclusion of bare life in the political realm constitutes the original—if concealed—nucleus of sovereign power. *It can even be said that the production of a biopolitical body is the original activity of sovereign power.*'<sup>9</sup>

<sup>5</sup> HS, p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*, tr. Harris Rackham, Cambridge, MA 1932, 1252b30.

<sup>7</sup> HS, p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> HS, pp. 8, 4, 6.

<sup>9</sup> HS, p. 6.

Agamben makes no distinction between the private and the political, on the one hand, and nature and culture on the other. For him, 'the fundamental activity of sovereign power is the production of bare life as originary political element and as threshold of articulation between nature and culture, *zōē* and *bios*.' The implications of this are elaborated in terms of the Aristotelian distinction between voice (expressive forms of communication shared with animals) and language (the rational communication needed to establish justice in the *polis*). Arguing that "The question "In what way does the living being have language?" corresponds exactly to the question "In what way does bare life dwell in the *polis*?"", Agamben suggests that the state of exception is characterized by the production of life-forms deprived of communication.<sup>10</sup>

A model is provided by the nineteenth-century biologist Ernst Haeckel, who postulated an ape-man without speech, *homo alalus*, as the evolutionary ancestor of *homo sapiens*. In what sense would the non-speaking man be a man rather than an ape? Is it not simply a matter of positing a creature already fully human and then depriving it of speech? In the same way, the state of exception 'functions by excluding as not (yet) human an already human being from itself, that is, by animalizing the human'.<sup>11</sup>

This move clarifies and expands the range of life forms potentially created by sovereign power. Not just the *homo alalus*, or ape-man, but also the *Muselmann*, the hopeless victim of the camps, the neomort and the overcomatose person. Above all, sovereignty creates outlaws such as the *homo sacer*, the 'sacred' outlaw of ancient Rome, whom all were free to kill with impunity. The life of the outlaw 'is pure *zōē*',<sup>12</sup> and so the exclusion of a human from the *polis* is equivalent to the inclusion of bare life within it—a doubling represented in the archetypal figure of the werewolf:

a monstrous hybrid of human and animal, divided between the forest and the city—the werewolf—is, therefore, in its origin the figure of the man who has been banned from the city . . . The life of the bandit, like that of the sacred man, is not a piece of animal nature without any relation to law and

<sup>10</sup> HS, pp. 181, 8.

<sup>11</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, tr. Kevin Attell, Stanford 2004, pp. 34–8. In this respect, Agamben argues, modernity differs from antiquity, which tended to humanize the animal, treating the slave, the barbarian and the foreigner as 'figures of an animal in human form.'

<sup>12</sup> HS, p. 183.



the city. It is, rather, a threshold of indistinction and of passage between animal and man.<sup>13</sup>

Where, as in contemporary politics, exception becomes increasingly the norm, 'the realm of bare life—which is originally situated at the margins of the political order—gradually begins to coincide with the political realm' and exclusion and inclusion, *bios* and *zōē* enter into 'a zone of irreducible indistinction'. Then 'all citizens can be said . . . to appear virtually as *homines sacri*'.<sup>14</sup>

### *Capabilities*

Amartya Sen first turned to Aristotle for a very different reason: to free himself from the utilitarian emphasis on a single aggregate measure of utility. Aristotle reminds us that pleasures may be as distinct as the activities involved, so even if we were to take pleasure as the only measure we would still be left with pleasures of incommensurable kinds. Nevertheless, Sen argued, the resulting plurality may be constitutive rather than competitive, provided we think of utility as a vector with several distinct components.<sup>15</sup>

On this basis, he began to recast his account of plural utility, arguing that individual circumstances and life-achievements might be considered as functionings that could be combined into a 'functioning vector'. A person's potential functioning vectors would then constitute a capability set, which could provide a context-sensitive basis for comparison of standards of living and interpersonal equality.<sup>16</sup> Only later did it dawn on Sen that his account of capabilities had 'something in common' with Aristotle's analysis of human functions in which 'the good of man resides in the function of man'.<sup>17</sup>

It was Martha Nussbaum who elaborated the Aristotelian basis of this project, and found the proof text needed to link Sen's conception of plural utility with the Aristotelian conception of the role of the state:

<sup>13</sup> HS, p. 105

<sup>14</sup> HS, pp. 9 and III.

<sup>15</sup> Amartya Sen, 'Plural Utility', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 81 (1980/1), pp. 193–215.

<sup>16</sup> Amartya Sen, 'Well-Being, Agency and Freedom', *Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 82, no. 4 (1985), pp. 169–221.

<sup>17</sup> Amartya Sen, *On Ethics and Economics*, Oxford 1987, p. 64 fn. and Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1097b28.

'It is evident that the best *politeia* is that arrangement according to which anyone whatsoever might do best and live a flourishing life'.<sup>18</sup> Interpreting 'arrangement' (*taxis*) to mean a theory of distributive justice, 'anyone whatsoever' (*hostisoun*) to include 'each and every member of the community', and a 'flourishing life' (*zoiē makariōs*) to encompass both whatever functions are specific to a particular individual, and those generally needed for a full life, Nussbaum was able to gloss this as 'an Aristotelian conception of the proper function of government, according to which its task is to make available to each and every member of the community the basic necessary conditions of the capability to choose and live a fully good human life, with respect to each of the major functions included in that fully good life'.<sup>19</sup>

But what is a good human life? Does the human being as such actually have a function or activity? According to Aristotle

The mere act of living appears to be shared even by plants, whereas we are looking to the function peculiar to man; we must therefore set aside the life of nutrition and growth. Next in the scale will come some form of sentient life; but this too seems to be shared by horses, oxen and animals generally. There remains therefore what may be called the practical life of that which has reason.<sup>20</sup>

Seen in this light, there are, Nussbaum argues, 'two distinct thresholds: a threshold of capability to function beneath which a life will be so impoverished that it will not be human at all; and a somewhat higher

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<sup>18</sup> Martha Nussbaum, 'Nature, Function and Capability: Aristotle on Political Distribution', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 6 (1988) suppl. vol., p. 146 (citing Aristotle, *Politics*, 1324a23–5).

<sup>19</sup> Martha Nussbaum, 'Non-Relative Virtues: An Aristotelian Approach', in Nussbaum and Amartya Sen, eds, *The Quality of Life*, Oxford 1993, p. 265.

<sup>20</sup> Aristotle, *Nic. Ethics*, 1097b33–1098a4 (translation modified) Aristotle later explains that reason (*logos*) includes 'activity of the soul in accordance with reason or not without reason', a definition that might just include slaves and barbarians. It is interesting to note (in the light of Agamben's claims to the contrary) that, although the word is not actually repeated, *zōē* is here used to describe each of the three kinds of life, including the *praktikē zōē*. Nussbaum notes that 'if one comprehensively surveys the evidence, one discovers that *zōē* and *bios* function in exactly the same way: when they are used of a type or manner of life, they always designate a total mode or way of life, organized around the item named'. Martha Nussbaum, 'Aristotle on Human Nature and the Foundations of Ethics', in James Altham and Ross Harrison, eds, *World, Mind and Ethics: Essays on the Ethical Philosophy of Bernard Williams*, Cambridge 1995, p. 116; see pp. 128–9, fn. 50 for examples.

threshold, beneath which those characteristic functions are available in such a reduced way that, though we may judge the form of life a human one, we will not think it a *good* human life.<sup>21</sup> The task of the city is 'to effect the transition from one level of capability to another', from mere life to human life, and from human life to the good life. In the latter case, because 'the human being is by nature a political being', the city is more than instrumental, for Aristotle makes 'the self-sufficiency involved in human *eudaimonia* a communal and not a solitary self-sufficiency'.<sup>22</sup>

In practice, therefore, achieving a threshold means making a social transition. In the case of women, with whom Nussbaum was concerned in a UN-sponsored project in the late 1980s and early 1990s, this might involve working outside the family house, a major issue in societies where women are traditionally prohibited from doing so, even when survival is at stake. In this case the transition is from the 'private realm, or the home, in which people do things out of love and affection rather than mutual respect' to the 'public realm, characterized by reciprocity among rough equals'. But as women leave the family to enter the public realm, the public realm also means 'acknowledging that the family is a political institution, not part of a "private sphere" immune from justice'.<sup>23</sup>

But if, for women, reaching a threshold means a transition from the private to the political, Nussbaum is also keen to shift the emphasis of 'political animal' back towards the animal. Emphasizing that for Sen, too, 'the bodily capabilities and functionings are intrinsically good and not . . . *merely* instrumental means to other higher goods', Nussbaum argues that the Aristotelian conception of the human being as a 'political animal' means viewing a human as someone 'who has an animal body and whose human dignity, rather than being opposed to this animal nature, inheres in it, and in its temporal trajectory'.<sup>24</sup>

This applies not just to the animal life of humanity but to non-human animals as well. Kant might think 'human dignity and our moral

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<sup>21</sup> Martha Nussbaum, 'Human Capabilities, Female Human Beings', in Nussbaum and Jonathan Glover, eds, *Women, Culture and Development: A Study of Human Capabilities*, Oxford 1995, p. 81.

<sup>22</sup> Nussbaum, 'Nature, Function', p. 146; and 'Human Nature', p. 103.

<sup>23</sup> Martha Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership*, Cambridge, MA 2006, pp. 105, 1; henceforth FJ.

<sup>24</sup> FJ, pp. 176 and 87, see also p. 158.

capacity . . . radically separate from the natural world', but Aristotle saw 'considerable continuity between human capacity and the capacities of other animals'. For Nussbaum, human need has to include 'our animal neediness and animal capacities', and we have to acknowledge that 'our dignity just is the dignity of a certain sort of animal'.<sup>25</sup>

To achieve a threshold of animal capacity or dignity may imply a different type of transition. For many of the cases discussed in *Frontiers of Justice*, in which Nussbaum extends the scope of the capabilities approach to those of differing abilities, nationality or species, the transition does not involve entering the public realm. Some of those with impairments and disabilities 'could not be included in the group of political choosers, however generously we assess their potential', but if their capabilities link them 'to the human community rather than some other', they may nevertheless reach a threshold of human life.<sup>26</sup>

Although, for other species, political functionings fall outside the species norm, that does not mean that the capabilities of other species can be sustained within nature. Species sovereignty is one ideal, but for most animals it is simply not a possibility; for dogs, for example, there is usually 'no option to flourish in an all-dog community; their community is always one that includes intimate human members'. In any case, 'we cannot just leave nature alone and expect it to manage itself', for 'nature is not just, and species are not all nice'. The capabilities approach cannot be realized in the wild or without human intervention. It requires wheel-chairs to be made for disabled Alsations, and 'the intelligent and careful use of zoos and animal parks', for only in such places can non-human animals realize their capabilities without mutual harm.<sup>27</sup>

### Vectors

For both Nussbaum and Agamben, the essential dichotomy is between the good life, or the political life, and the life that is, for whatever reason, lacking in those qualities. Like Aristotle, both emphasize that this amounts to the difference between what is distinctively human and what is less than fully human. Aristotle had argued that anyone who lives a life of pleasure is, in effect, 'choosing the life of dumb grazing animals', and that anyone who is perpetually asleep, or comatose, is living

<sup>25</sup> FJ, pp. 130–2.

<sup>26</sup> FJ, p. 188.

<sup>27</sup> FJ, pp. 366, 388, 390, 370–1.

the life of a vegetable.<sup>28</sup> Nussbaum suggests that failure to allow a basic capability to develop is to condemn whoever possesses it to 'a kind of premature death, the death of a form of flourishing', while Agamben offers an entire bestiary of bare life extending all the way to a tick that lived in a laboratory for many years without movement or nutrition.<sup>29</sup>

But if, for Agamben, bare life is the hopeless destination toward which the logic of modernity points, for Nussbaum it is the base from which capabilities are expanded and joyfully transformed into functionings. The polarities appear to be the same, but the directions different. If so, is there some point at which human flourishing and bestialization meet, some limbo in which the half-dead pass those whose capabilities have been brought to life?

One way to establish this is to take coordinates from Aristotle. The passage that is central to both Nussbaum and Agamben reads as follows:

It is clear that the city-state is a natural growth, and that man is by nature a political animal, and a man that is by nature and not merely by fortune citiless is either low in the scale of humanity [an inferior being] or above it (like the 'clanless, lawless, heartless' man reviled by Homer . . .) inasmuch as he resembles an isolated piece at draughts. And why man is a political animal in a greater measure than any bee or any gregarious animal is clear. For nature, as we declare, doth nothing without purpose; and man alone of all the animals possesses speech [logos]. The mere voice, it is true, can indicate pain or pleasure, and therefore is possessed by the other animals as well (for their nature has been developed so far as to have sensations of what is painful and pleasant and signify these sensations to one another), but speech is designed to indicate the advantageous and the harmful, and therefore also the right and the wrong; for it is the special property of man in distinction from the other animals that he alone has perception of good and bad and right and wrong and the other moral qualities, and it is partnership in these things that makes a household and a city state.<sup>30</sup>

In this famous, and much debated passage, which follows an account of the evolution of ever larger aggregations of humanity, from the couple to the city-state, Aristotle implicitly defines the *zōon politikon* in terms of two variables that are at least conceptually distinguishable. On the one hand there is natural gregariousness, which is opposed to natural solitude, and on the other, there is *logos*, which is opposed to voice.

<sup>28</sup> Aristotle, *Nic. Ethics*, 1095b20.

<sup>29</sup> FJ, p. 347; Agamben, *The Open*, p. 47.

<sup>30</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*, 1253a.

Gregariousness, as Aristotle explains elsewhere, is just a matter of flocking together, and as such is common to land, air and sea creatures of many species. Solitary animals may include man himself, people like the outlaw described by Homer. In contrast, the distinction between voice and *logos* is a measure of what distinguishes the human from the animal. So, not all gregarious animals have rational speech, and not everyone that has speech is gregarious.

The implied relationship between Aristotle's taxonomic categories is often unclear, but the *logos*-voice axis is perhaps better thought of as intersecting with the gregarious-solitary axis than as a subdivision or extension of it. When Aristotle says that humans are more political than bees, he does not mean that they are more gregarious, but rather that they have some other quality as well. Political animals are distinguished from the merely gregarious by having a common activity. Examples include 'man, bees, wasps, ants, cranes', some of which live under a ruler and some of which do not.<sup>31</sup> What makes gregarious animals political is a shared way of life to which all contribute, and what makes humans even more political is having *logos*, for rational communication permits common activity of greater social and moral complexity.

Within the terrain mapped by Aristotle's definition of the political animal, there would therefore appear to be two axes: one that extends from solitude to gregariousness, and from the private to the public, and another that extends from voice to *logos*, or nature to culture. Using these axes, it becomes possible to plot with more precision the vectors described by Agamben and Nussbaum, both in relation to Aristotle and to each other.

Foucault was primarily concerned with the axis that leads from the private to the public, and with a double imbrication brought about through the regulation of bodies and populations—simultaneously an encroachment of the private upon the public and the public upon the private. Agamben turns Foucault's vector of privatization toward naturalization by interpreting the private-public axis in terms of the *zōē/bios* distinction; and (through the equation of *zōē* with speechlessness) by enhancing the literalness of Foucault's 'bestialization of man'. The reorientation is completed when Agamben shifts the emphasis to sovereign power.

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<sup>31</sup> Aristotle, *Historia Animalium*, 1488a10.

Hobbes, he argues, does not think of the state of nature as a prehistoric epoch, but as a 'principle internal to the State revealed in the moment in which the State is considered "as if it were dissolved"'. In the state of nature, man is wolf to man, so 'this lupinization of man and humanization of the wolf is at every moment possible in the *dissolutio civitatis* inaugurated by the state of exception'.<sup>32</sup>

A *dissolutio civitatis* might be expected to effect a return to the private realm, for Agamben claims to be working with 'the classical distinction between *zōē* and *bios*, between private life and political existence, between man as a simple living being at home in the house and man's political existence in the city'.<sup>33</sup> But although he places bare life 'in the no-man's land between the home and the city' it is apparent that in his examples of men exiled from the city, the outlaw does not retire to enjoy a private life with his family.<sup>34</sup> The werewolf is to be found between 'the forest and the city', not half-way between the *polis* and the *oikos*.

Nussbaum takes as her starting point Rousseau's memorable picture of bare life ('All are born naked and poor. All are subject to the miseries of life . . .'), and argues that 'people are entitled not only to mere life, but to a life compatible with human dignity'.<sup>35</sup> Because man is political, acquiring human dignity involves projecting the alienated, the private and the ungregarious into the public realm, and because man is an animal this means that his animal needs and animal dignity find their satisfaction in the public realm as well. Initially at least, Nussbaum is working primarily with the private-public axis, where she describes a vector which (like Foucault's 'optimization of the capabilities of the body') travels from bare life towards the public sphere.

However, because animal dignity is of a kind shared by non-human animals as well, the optimization of non-human capabilities also inscribes a trajectory that leads not so much from private to public as from nature to culture. And in *Frontiers of Justice* she switches her attention to the other axis. Rather as the *homo sacer* does not go home but ends up becoming part of nature instead, the animal whose capabilities are developed participates in culture rather than politics. Although each takes something like a ninety-degree turn, the trajectories described by Nussbaum

<sup>32</sup> HS, p. 106.

<sup>33</sup> HS, p. 187.

<sup>34</sup> HS, p. 90.

<sup>35</sup> Rousseau, *Emile*, book 4; epigraph for Nussbaum, 'Human Capabilities, Female Human Beings', p. 63.

and Agamben continue to be opposing vectors: Agamben's equation of the *dissolutio civitatis* with the state of nature allows bare life to take on animal form, while Nussbaum, translating animal dignity into the dignity of animals, brings nature into the sphere of culture.

There is, it seems, no one route to the biopolitical, only converging vectors of privatization, naturalization, acculturation and socialization. But what is the unknown region into which political exiles, werewolves, Alsatians in wheelchairs and working women all now wearily make their way?

### *The absent centre*

In Aristotle, both the solitary–gregarious and the voice–*logos* axes are continuous and have a discernible, if poorly defined middle ground. Between solitude and the gregariousness of the city, there are first couples, then households, then villages. Those who inhabit the middle of the range are to a greater or lesser degree scattered, a condition shared by Cyclopes and ground larks, amongst other creatures.<sup>36</sup> Between voice and *logos* there are the intermediate states as well. The slave 'participates in reason so far as to apprehend it but not to possess it' and lacks the deliberative part of the soul; women have the deliberative part but without full authority; children possess it in undeveloped form.<sup>37</sup>

These two axes meet in the household, which is about half-way between solitude and gregariousness, and potentially incorporates all the states between *logos* and voice—the master, the wife, the slave, the ox.<sup>38</sup> Aristotle admitted that 'man is not only a political but also a domestic animal [*oikonomikon zōon*]', and at the intersection of the axes this is what all would appear to become.<sup>39</sup> Yet Aristotle could not conceive of a household without a master, or a situation in which households alone could occupy anything other than a discontinuous social space. The middle ground is there, but sparsely populated.

So what happens when man becomes, biopolitically, a domestic animal? Agamben points to 'a zone of indifference . . . within which—like a "missing link" which is always lacking because it is already virtually

<sup>36</sup> See David Depew, 'Humans and Other Political Animals in Aristotle's *History of Animals*', *Phronesis*, vol. 40, no. 2 (1995), pp. 156–81.

<sup>37</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*, 1254b22–3, 1260a10–14.

<sup>38</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*, 1252b12.

<sup>39</sup> Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics*, 1242a23.



present—the articulation between human and animal, man and non-man, speaking being and living being, must take place. Like every space of exception, this zone is, in truth, perfectly empty'.<sup>40</sup>

But the void has a name. Hannah Arendt, whose argument in *The Human Condition* Agamben otherwise follows quite closely, calls it society, or 'the social'. In antiquity, the household 'was the sphere where the necessities of life . . . were taken care of', and in the modern world society is a sort of 'national household', in which 'mutual dependence for the sake of life and nothing else assumes public significance and where the activities connected with sheer survival are permitted to appear in public'.<sup>41</sup>

This 'national household' or 'society' is also conceived in Aristotelian terms, though Arendt reinterprets both axes in her own way. The axis which leads from solitude to gregariousness, the private to the public, is defined by the polarities of labour and action. Labour includes and supports the biological processes of the human body, and does not need the presence of others; action, as 'the only activity that goes on directly between men without the intermediary of things or matter', is 'entirely dependent upon the constant presence of others'.<sup>42</sup>

Action alone constitutes the *bios politikos*, and a life without it 'has ceased to be a human life because it is no longer lived among men', like the life of the *animal laborans* who is 'imprisoned in the privacy of his own body'.<sup>43</sup> But modernity has seen the triumph of the *animal laborans*, as economic and technological advance has freed mankind from necessity, and brought the private activities of production and consumption into the public realm, replacing it with a 'consumers' society'.

Alongside this, Arendt develops a distinctive account of the other axis in which the opposites are represented by 'the world', which is 'the human artefact, the fabrication of human hands', and 'the earth or nature'. The earth 'provides human beings with a habitat in which they can move and breathe', but through work, as opposed to labour, is formed 'an "artificial" world of things, distinctly different from all natural surroundings'. Work is therefore the activity 'which corresponds to the unnaturalness of human existence'; it separates man from his environment, even though

<sup>40</sup> HS, pp. 37–8.

<sup>41</sup> HC, p. 46.

<sup>42</sup> HC, pp. 97, 22.

<sup>43</sup> HC, pp. 176, 118.

'life itself is outside this artificial world, and through life man remains related to all other living organisms'.<sup>44</sup>

Human life, in so far as it is world-building, is engaged in reification, but scientific doubt and secularization undermine the perceived permanence and value of culture, and so humans become separated from the world that they have created. In 'world alienation' it is 'as though we had forced open the distinguishing boundaries which protected the world, the human artifice, from nature' and all that is left are 'appetites and desires, the senseless urges of [man's] body'. In this state, whatever was 'not necessitated by life's metabolism with nature, was either superfluous or could be justified only in terms of a peculiarity of human as distinguished from other animal life—so that Milton was considered to have written his *Paradise Lost* for the same reasons and out of similar urges that compel the silkworm to produce silk'.<sup>45</sup> Here, language becomes voice, and culture returns to nature.

On both axes there is a double movement. Modernity has been both world-alienating and earth-alienating, as the abstractions of science and technology have distanced man from the earth. At the same time, 'the final stage in the disappearance of the public realm' has been accompanied by the 'liquidation of the private realm', the two realms 'constantly flow into each other like waves in the never-resting stream of the life-process itself' until 'the submersion of both in the sphere of the social'.<sup>46</sup>

### *Into the maelstrom*

For Arendt, the vectors of the biopolitical form the vortex of the social. But as she recoiled from the maelstrom, she watched others behold it with equanimity. In particular, Marx, who, she claimed, transformed the vortex of modernity into a political programme. The 'withering away of the public realm' in which the state gives way to pure administration was the prelude to Marx's 'withering away of the state'. Marx did not, indeed, could not have known that 'the germs of communistic society were present in the reality of a national household', but 'a complete victory of society will always produce some sort of "communistic fiction", whose outstanding political characteristic is that it is indeed ruled by an invisible hand'.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>44</sup> HC, pp. 52, 7, 2.

<sup>46</sup> HC, pp. 67, 330, 69.

<sup>45</sup> HC, pp. 126, 320–1.

<sup>47</sup> HC, pp. 44–5.

Conversely, Marx's 'socialization of man' embodied the opposing vector. It could be achieved by revolutionary expropriation, but 'a slower and no less certain "withering away" of the private realm in general and of private property in particular' was already underway, as the private became increasingly political. For example, 'the fact that the modern age emancipated the working classes and the women at nearly the same historical moment must certainly be counted among the characteristics of an age which no longer believes that bodily functions and material functions should be hidden'.<sup>48</sup>

Arendt's identification of Marxism with modernity was intended as a critique of both. Yet Sen and Nussbaum make what amounts to the same claim when they insist that the capabilities approach 'takes its start from the Aristotelian/Marxian conception of the human being as a social and political being, who finds fulfilment in relations with others'.<sup>49</sup> Nussbaum argues that 'the basic intuitive idea of my version of the capabilities approach is . . . a life that has available in it "truly human functioning" in the sense described by Marx',<sup>50</sup> and she repeatedly uses a quotation from Marx as an epigraph:

It will be seen how in place of the *wealth* and *poverty* of political economy come the *rich human being* and the rich human need. The *rich* human being is simultaneously the human being *in need* of a totality of human-life activities—the man in whom his own realization exists as an inner necessity, as *need*.<sup>51</sup>

The passage in question describes the transformed life of man under communism, and Nussbaum explicitly equates 'truly human functioning' with this condition. Acknowledging that 'the *sense* caught up in crude practical need has only a *restricted* sense', Marx had argued in the 'Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts' that 'it is obvious that the *human* eye gratifies itself in a way different from the crude non-human eye; the human *ear* from the crude ear'. It is precisely this transformation that is involved in the transition from basic capabilities to full functioning. According to Nussbaum, the central task of the city is not to take

<sup>48</sup> HC, pp. 72–3.

<sup>49</sup> FJ, p. 85. Before Nussbaum turned his attention to Aristotle, Marx was Sen's chief point of reference; see Sen, 'Plural Utility', p. 198; 'Well-being', p. 202 fn.; *On Ethics*, p. 46 fn.

<sup>50</sup> FJ, pp. 74–5.

<sup>51</sup> Marx, 'Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts', quoted in Nussbaum, 'Nature, Function', p. 145.

care of people's 'perceptual needs in a mechanical way, producing a seeing eye, a hearing ear, etc'; it is rather to 'make it possible for people to use their bodies and their senses in a truly human way'.<sup>52</sup>

Similar alignments between Marxist thought and the vectors of the biopolitical are to be found on the nature–culture axis. According to Arendt, 'world alienation' is the equivalent of Marx's dealienation, in which man reappropriates cultural production as a species being. It was Marx who likened Milton to a silkworm, and in the Marxist utopia, where all may write poetry on this basis, 'world alienation is even more present than it was before'.<sup>53</sup> Agamben makes the same point, quoting Kojève's version of the 'Hegelo-Marxist end of history', where 'men would construct their edifices and works of art as birds build their nests and spiders spin their webs, and would perform musical concerts after the fashion of frogs and cicadas'.<sup>54</sup> And it is, of course, Marx's claim that 'communism as completed naturalism is humanism and as completed humanism is naturalism'<sup>55</sup> that is knowingly echoed in Agamben's statement that the 'lupinization of man and humanization of the wolf is at every moment possible in the *dissolutio civitatis*'.

### *Valences of the social*

Although the vectors of the biopolitical are plotted in Aristotelian terms, their trajectories are derived not so much from Aristotle as from Marx's reading of him. It is as though Marx's early vision of communism had been bisected, with Agamben taking up his account of depoliticization and naturalization, and Nussbaum his vision of socialization and humanization. But if biopolitics and capabilities represent two halves of Marx's totalizing theory, can they also be reunited to describe a single movement?

Not necessarily, for the fragments have acquired widely differing valences: Sen and Nussbaum present the capabilities approach as being equivalent to (and perhaps a substitute for) the projected path of human development envisioned by communism; while for Arendt and Agamben, the

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<sup>52</sup> Nussbaum, 'Nature, Function', p. 183.

<sup>53</sup> HC, p. 254.

<sup>54</sup> Agamben, *The Open*, p. 9.

<sup>55</sup> Karl Marx, 'Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts', *Early Texts*, tr. David McLellan, Oxford 1971, p. 148.

logic of modernity is identical with that which leads to totalitarianism and the camps. At one point, Agamben comes close to describing the convergence of all the vectors: 'for a humanity that has become animal again, there is nothing left but the depoliticization of human societies by means of the unconditioned unfolding of the *oikonomia*, or the taking on of biological life itself as the supreme political (or rather impolitical) task.' He acknowledges its imaginative location in Kojève's end of history, but finds its historical realization in 'the totalitarianisms of the twentieth century'.<sup>56</sup>

Something of this duality is already present in Marx. When read in the light of Aristotle's definition of the political animal, it becomes apparent that states of alienation and communism are created in a similar way. Marx himself acknowledges that the alienated man of civil society is the closest approximation to the socialized political animal of Aristotle:

Only in the eighteenth century, in 'civil society', do the various forms of social connectedness confront the individual as a mere means towards his private purposes, as external necessity. But the epoch which produces this standpoint, that of the isolated individual, is also precisely that of the hitherto most developed social (from this standpoint, general) relations. The human being is in the most literal sense a *zōon politikon* [political animal], not merely a gregarious animal, but an animal which can individuate itself only in the midst of society.<sup>57</sup>

The parallel is unsurprising, for both alienation and communism are defined within the same matrix, one axis of which locates man's simultaneous alienation from nature and from his own cultural production, the other his alienation from both public and private life. Marx's early references to alienation allude to one or another of these forms of estrangement: 'alienated labour tears man from the object of his production . . . his own body, nature exterior to him, and his intellectual being, his human essence'.<sup>58</sup> Together they constitute alienation from species-being, the life that man would have if he were fully socialized, and society was not merely the means but also the end.

If alienation has at least a fourfold form—from culture and from nature, and from the private and the political—so too does dealienation.

<sup>56</sup> Agamben, *The Open*, p. 76.

<sup>57</sup> Marx, Introduction, *Grundrisse*, tr. Martin Nicolaus, Harmondsworth 1973, p. 84.

<sup>58</sup> Marx, 'Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts', *Early Texts*, p. 140.

Communism involves 'the positive abolition of all alienation, thus the return of man out of religion, family, state, etc [he might have added, nature], into his human, i.e. social being'.<sup>59</sup> It takes place both on the public-private axis, where 'human emancipation will only be complete when the real, individual man has absorbed into himself the abstract citizen; when as an individual man, in his everyday life, in his work, and in his relationships, he has become a *species-being*'; and on that of nature and culture: 'society completes the essential unity of man and nature . . . the accomplished naturalism of man and the accomplished humanism of nature'.<sup>60</sup>

What then constitutes the difference between communism and alienation? Are they, as Arendt implied, just alternative ways of describing the same thing? Marx presents the vectors of the biopolitical as part of an ambiguous totality. Alienation and communism happen in the same place, in that both are the product of the same vectors. However, in the former, only man has been transformed, as he moves away from static polarities; in the latter, the world itself is changed as those polarities draw together. The alienated human beings of civil society are prematurely social, living in society before the socialization of the world.

Within this context, communism is an act of restoration, 'a *restoration* of the human world and of human relationships to *man himself*.' For example, in civil society man is on the one hand 'a member of civil society . . . and on the other a citizen', and there is a gap between the two that is closed when 'individual man has absorbed into himself the abstract citizen'.<sup>61</sup> This involves not so much the transformation of the individual as the transformation of the world through the withering away of the state. Similarly, whereas for Nussbaum, the transition from animal seeing to human sight is effected through the transformation of the individual, and the social functions only as the means to that transformation, Marx envisaged something different. For him, 'the human character of the senses . . . can only come into being through the existence of *its* object, through humanized nature'; the eye becomes 'a *human* eye when its *object* has become a *human*, social object' and this occurs only when 'he himself becomes a social being and society becomes a being for him in

<sup>59</sup> Marx, 'Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts', *Early Texts*, p. 149.

<sup>60</sup> Marx, 'On the Jewish Question', *Early Writings*, tr. Thomas Bottomore, London 1963, p. 31; and 'Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts', *Early Texts*, p. 150.

<sup>61</sup> Marx, 'On the Jewish Question', *Early Writings*, p. 31.

this object'.<sup>62</sup> The difference between the capabilities approach and the Marxist project it seeks to realize here becomes apparent, for moving from bare capability to fully human functioning is alienating just in so far as it is not universal.

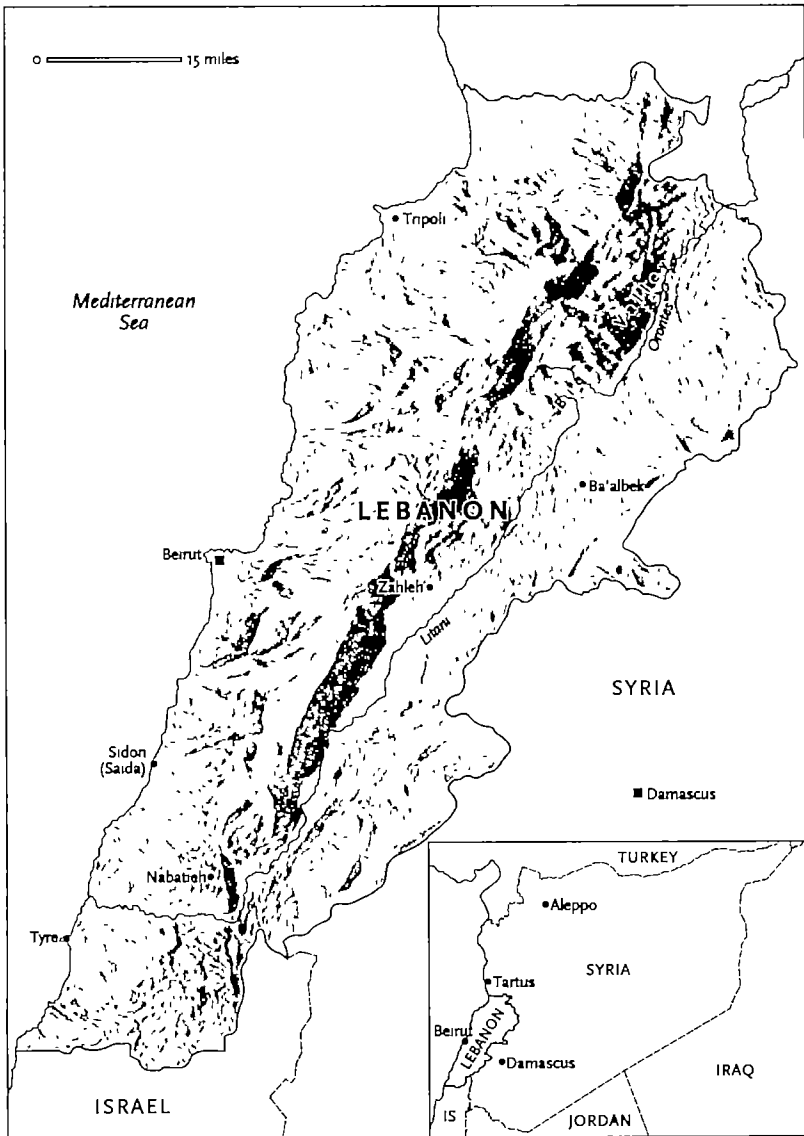
The same applies to other vectors of the biopolitical. One man excluded from the public realm is disenfranchised, when all are excluded the public realm has disappeared; the zoo animal is alienated from nature in a way that the domestic animal is not; one woman who escapes the confines of the family is distanced from private life, a large voluntary female labour force is not; we cannot all be *homines sacri*: the solitary werewolf may be alienated from his culture, but when we all become werewolves there is no more wolf and no more man. Vehicles of both alienation and of dealienation, the vectors of the biopolitical also provide the measure of each in terms of their differential distribution of a population.

Not everyone is likely to welcome equally the dissolution of politics, the acculturation of nature, the politicization of private life and the naturalization of culture, though most will recognize the relevant vectors within their environment. Less obvious, perhaps, is the extent to which such vectors are enacting a single movement that defines the social space of modernity—the degree of their convergence the index of society. And yet there is no vanishing point—a disenfranchised man does not become a simian citizen, nor a working woman a werewolf—only a diminishing space of contestation, where all try to live the good life, together.

Reuniting the vectors potentially provides a means of articulating the politics of this conceptually expanded but biopolitically contracting field. In particular, it allows us to distinguish, in ways that Marx did not, the state of being equally social from that of being socially equal: the first is measured by convergence between vectors, the second by distributions effected by them. For an egalitarian at least, it may be useful to differentiate non-social equalities—of citizens, members of a family, of animals in nature—from the specifically social equalities that are a function of distances travelled and numbers left behind. To be equally social and socially equal may be utopian, but seeking to measure progress in that direction is not.

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<sup>62</sup> Marx, 'Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts', *Early Writings*, pp. 160–1.





JOHN CHALCRAFT

## LABOUR IN THE LEVANT

*What am I, a man or a resource?*

Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*

VISIONS OF INTERNATIONAL migration have, on the Left, been divided into two broad political and historiographical currents.<sup>1</sup> On the one hand, an anti-colonial Marxist and feminist tradition has long seen labour migration as a means for capitalism and imperialism to exploit menial, cheap and quiescent labour, the 'new helots' of the post-colonial world.<sup>2</sup> On the other, scholars in cultural and post-colonial studies have generally told a more upbeat story, in which border-crossing, hybridity and migrant agency work to destabilize foundationalist metanarratives, complicate simple binaries of Self and Other, and raise hopes for a 'cosmopolitan dawn'.

These important debates have almost invariably been fought out in the context of migration to Europe or its ex-settler colonies. Most of the seminal studies of recent decades have been concerned with North–North or South–North migration, and even in the latter case have tended to focus on the conditions in, and concerns of, the metropolitan West.<sup>3</sup> After a half-century during which migration destinations have become increasingly globalized, from West Africa to the Caribbean, South East Asia to the Middle East, and at a time when it is reported by the United Nations that more than a third of all migrants—71 million people—work in the 'less developed' world, this state of affairs is hardly justifiable.<sup>4</sup> One little-known but important example of what might be termed South–South labour migration are the hundreds of thousands of Syrians working in Lebanon since the 1950s and 60s. Drawing on ethnographic and archival research conducted in Lebanon and Syria since 2003, I will argue that it is not always necessary to make a choice between economic Marxist and celebratory cultural studies, as elements from both traditions can be re-articulated to give new insights about migration.<sup>5</sup> As we shall

see, forms of complexity, combination, hybridity and agency all rightly associated with international labour migration, far from implying emancipation, operate to construct hierarchy, exclusion and the disciplines of commodification.

### *Measuring migration*

Almost completely ignored by scholars, especially in the English-speaking world, although highly controversial among Lebanese at different times, Syrian migrants have for decades provided Lebanon with the bulk of its unskilled workforce, political crises aside.<sup>6</sup> The historical relationship between the two countries has been shaped by sectarian distinctions, economic interdependence, foreign influence and military intervention. The Maronite Christian communities of Mount Lebanon, traditionally oriented westwards towards their co-religionists, won substantial autonomy from the Ottomans in 1861, in a deal brokered by European

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<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to As'ad Abu Khalil, Sharad Chari, Alex Colas, Jens Hanssen, Laleh Khalili, Zachary Lockman, Martha Mundy and Yaseen Noorani for their invaluable feedback on earlier versions of this paper. I would also like to thank Kifah Hanna, Ghassan Maasri and Khaled Malas for their assistance with research and translation.

<sup>2</sup> Robin Cohen, *The New Helots: Migrants in the International Division of Labour*, Aldershot, UK 1987.

<sup>3</sup> See, inter alia, Michael Piore, *Birds of Passage: Migrant Labour and Industrial Societies*, Cambridge 1979; Saskia Sassen, *The Mobility of Labour and Capital: A study in international investment and labour flow*, Cambridge 1988, Alejandro Portes, ed., *The Economic Sociology of Immigration: Essays on Networks, Ethnicity and Entrepreneurship*, New York 1995.

<sup>4</sup> *Trends in Total Migrant Stock: The 2005 Revision*, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, February 2006.

<sup>5</sup> Interviews were conducted between 2004 and 2006 with Syrian migrants practising a wide range of occupations, from diverse regions and with different statuses in Lebanon and Syria, as well as with Syrian and Lebanese intellectuals, employers, officials, consultants, academics, NGO employees, workers, engineers and journalists. Pseudonyms were chosen by respondents to protect their identities. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations are from these interviews.

<sup>6</sup> For the most important research in this area, see Elizabeth Picard, 'Les Syriens, l'envers du décor', in Jade Tabet, ed., *Beyrouth: La brûlure des rêves*, Paris 2001, pp. 92–102; Bassam al-Hashim, *Al-Ittifaqat al-Ijtima'iyya* [Social Agreements], in *Al-'Alaqa al-Lubnaniyya al-Suriyya* [Lebanese–Syrian Relations], Antakya 2000, pp. 110–48, Nada Oweijane Khoury, 'L'immigration au Liban Aspects socio-économiques et incidences identitaires', doctoral thesis, 3 vols, Université Libanaise: Institut des Sciences Sociales and Université Paris V 2001.

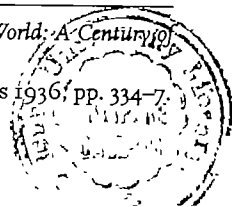
powers eager to project influence into the Near East—France foremost among them. After World War I, the French divided the territories mandated to them by the Treaty of Sèvres into Syria and ‘Grand Liban’—the latter far larger than the Maronite-dominated zone, which gained a substantial agricultural hinterland and the coastal cities of Beirut, Tripoli, Sidon and Tyre. A state with a complex and unstable sectarian mix was created in the process. Many Sunni residents still saw themselves as part of the wider Arab entity of ‘Greater Syria’. Lebanon gained formal independence in 1943, Syria in 1946, but migration between the two remains inflected to this day by commonalities that predate the colonial redrawing of boundaries.

There had been extensive economic out-migration, mostly to the Americas, from the Ottoman *mashriq* during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which continued during the early years of the French mandate.<sup>7</sup> In the Syrian countryside during the 1930s, as one colonial geographer noted, it was ‘rare to encounter a group of four or five Muslims without one of them proposing to speak to you in Spanish or Portuguese.’<sup>8</sup> But Syrian migration to Lebanon began in earnest in the 1950s and 1960s. Processes of global and regional accumulation, along with land reforms and other interventions by the state, displaced rural cultivators from Syria’s grain-producing plains. Sharecroppers became enmeshed in a system characterized by market mechanisms, the advance of property rights and the destruction of alternative means of subsistence. These processes, and the accompanying land poverty, cash hunger and rising consumption patterns, sent new waves of migrants towards rural development projects in northern Syria, urban centres such as Aleppo and Damascus, and neighbouring Lebanon.

The Lebanese ‘merchant republic’, committed to a form of laissez-faire and already relatively wealthy compared to Syria, swiftly consolidated its position as a regional hub for trade, finance, real estate and tourism, offering work and wages which Syria did not. Lebanon’s economic position was enhanced as the region’s increasing oil wealth was financed through Beirut, while capital and businessmen came to Lebanon from Arab countries that were turning to versions of statism and Arab socialism in the 1960s. In 1970, Lebanese General Security, regulating entries and exits

<sup>7</sup> Albert Hourani and Nadim Shehadi, eds, *The Lebanese in the World: A Century of Emigration*, London 1992.

<sup>8</sup> Richard Thoumin, *Géographie humaine de la Syrie Centrale*, Paris 1936, pp. 334–7.



at the border, counted 279,541 Syrian workers in Lebanon on a temporary basis.<sup>9</sup> If this figure is approximately correct—these numbers were far less politicized in 1970 than in the 1990s—then Syrians had quickly come to make up a highly significant addition to the Lebanese workforce, estimated at only 572,000 people.<sup>10</sup> With out-migration, rising wages and somewhat improved social provision for Lebanese workers—partly as a result of organized labour and the redistributive measures adopted under President Fuad Chehab (1958–64)—Lebanese employers sought cheaper and more malleable ‘human resources’ from abroad. Geographical proximity, rapidly expanding road transport, open borders and the networks established by Syrian bourgeoisie and workers alike all underpinned patterns of migration.

During the 1950s and 60s, Syrian workers in Lebanon were not nearly as controversial as they were to become, and there was only limited mobilization by the Lebanese labour movement against the cheaper competition. The power elite in the merchant republic considered it natural that the ‘Switzerland of the East’ should attract manual workers from its less well-off neighbours; the Lebanese economic miracle required inexpensive, unskilled ‘muscles’ which could not be supplied from within its own borders. In contrast to the Palestinian refugees, these workers were seen by many as temporary migrants who worked hard for low wages and did not press collective or political demands, nor seek to make a permanent home in Lebanon. This was a labour force that, as a 1972 newspaper headline put it, melts away at the end of the day ‘like sugar in tea’.<sup>11</sup> Such return migrants were no threat to Lebanese ‘civilization’ and no burden on the state; and they were a boon to employers, particularly as the costs of Lebanese labour were rising. Of course, this apparently tolerant attitude toward Syrian workers was strictly economic: it did not extend to their culture, politics or social impact.

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<sup>9</sup> André Bourgey and Joseph Pharès, ‘Les bidonvilles de l’agglomération de Beyrouth’, *Revue de géographie de Lyon*, vol. 48, no. 2 (1973), p. 121.

<sup>10</sup> Albert Dagher, ‘*Al-Quwa al-‘Amila wa al-Namu fi Lubnan* [Labour Power and Development in Lebanon]’, in UN Development Programme, *Linking Economic Growth and Social Development in Lebanon*, Beirut 2000, p. 86. Thus for every two working Lebanese there was one Syrian worker.

<sup>11</sup> ‘Quarter of a million Syrian workers melt away every evening like sugar in tea’, *Al-Sayyad*, 27 April 1972.

No workforce numbers are available for the civil war period (1975–90). Having initially aided Palestinian fighters, the Syrian army entered Lebanon in 1976 to prevent them and their Lebanese allies from securing a decisive victory over the Maronite militias. It became increasingly dangerous—often fatally so—for Syrian workers to move through the now homogenized Christian areas; they were seen as enemies by an isolationist nationalism that pinned its hopes on a francophone, West-leaning Lebanon, viewing the surrounding Arab-Islamic ocean as a threat to the country's sectarian balance, culture and identity. From the early 1980s onwards, with the onset of economic crisis, foreign workers in general started to be blamed for war-related and structural economic problems such as the sliding currency, budget deficits, unemployment and growing trade imbalances.

Accurate statistics for the numbers of Syrians in Lebanon are also elusive for the long post-war years of reconstruction, initiated under Syrian military and political control following the Ta'if Accords of 1989 and the Syrian victory over General Michel 'Aun in 1990–91. Lebanese opponents of Syria during the 1990s, who saw the 'army' of Syrian workers in the country as a fifth column for a Syrian project of occupation and even annexation, claimed with considerable exaggeration that 1.5 million Syrian workers lived in Lebanon: 'one Syrian for every two Lebanese', as the 'pro-Lebanese' press claimed in the mid-1990s.<sup>12</sup> 'Pro-Syrian' elements cited unlikely underestimates in return, putting the numbers between 50,000 and 253,000.<sup>13</sup> In this context, the best figures are those from Lebanese economists estimating labour force absorption by sector. These suggest that total numbers peaked at roughly 600,000 at the height of reconstruction in the mid-1990s, but fell with the recession to approximately 400,000 by 2000 and fluctuated around that number thereafter.<sup>14</sup> These are significant totals given that in 1997, the active

<sup>12</sup> Michel Murqus, *Al-Nahar*, 24 July 1995.

<sup>13</sup> The former figure was given by the Lebanese Labour Minister in 1994—see Scarlet Haddad, *L'Orient Le Jour*, 13 June 1994; the latter by demographer Roger Sawaya in a 1998 study for the Syrian–Lebanese Supreme Council: see *Al-Hayat*, 28 June 1998. For an attempted rebuttal by Michel Murqus, see *Al-Nahar*, 3 July, 1998. For analysis and references see Chalcraft, 'Syrian Workers in Lebanon and the Role of the State: political economy and popular aspirations', in François de Bel-Air, ed., *Migration et politique au Moyen-Orient*, Beirut 2006, pp. 81–104.

<sup>14</sup> See Albert Dagher, 'Al-Quwa Al-'Amila', pp. 85–99. See also economists Kamal Hamdan, Marwan Iskandar and Ghassan 'Ayyash, quoted in *al-Safir*, 19 April 2005.

labour force of Lebanese nationals, out of roughly 4 million inhabitants, was about 1.25 million.<sup>15</sup> In the early 2000s it was estimated that Syrian workers were worth up to \$1 billion per annum to their Lebanese employers, while their remittances comprised as much as 8 per cent of Syrian GDP—almost half the proportion accounted for by oil exports.<sup>16</sup>

In 2005, the Lebanese government published a two-volume classification of all occupations in Lebanon, which shed light on the present situation of Syrian migrants in the country.<sup>17</sup> The workforce was divided by status and income into nine groups. Group one included legislators, senior civil servants, executives, directors and managers; group nine, on the other hand, comprised 'unskilled workers and employees' such as unskilled services and sales employees, and manual workers in agriculture, quarries, construction, public works, manufacturing and transport. Although numbers are still lacking, there is much evidence to suggest that the great majority of group nine jobs have been taken by Syrians.

Not all Syrians in Lebanon work as unskilled labourers, of course. In the 1960s, in particular, wealthy Syrians unsympathetic to Ba'athism relocated to Lebanon. They took Lebanese citizenship and became bankers and businessmen. Other Syrians, especially since the early 1990s, have found more skilled and better remunerated positions in groups eight—'machine operators'—and seven, 'crafts and craft-like occupations' (including electricians, plumbers and so on). Still, the great majority of Syrians migrating to Lebanon are unskilled workers, waged for the last decade or so at around \$10 a day. As has aptly been said, 'Lebanon was built with Syrian muscles'.

### *Hostile regimes*

Syrians in Lebanon have long endured low pay and a lack of job security and income guarantees. There are few limits set on working hours, night-shifts and child labour, and minimal access to breaks. Weekly, national or annual holidays (paid or unpaid) are rare. Work may be monotonous,

<sup>15</sup> République Libanaise, *Etudes Statistiques* no. 12, *La population active en 1997*, Beirut 1998, p. 11.

<sup>16</sup> Elizabeth Picard, *Lebanon: A Shattered Country*, rev. ed., New York 2002, p. 193; Economist Intelligence Unit, *Syria Country Profile* 2006, p. 34.

<sup>17</sup> *Tasnif al-Mihan fi Lubnan* [Classification of Occupations in Lebanon], 2 vols, Beirut 2005.

dirty, noisy, polluted and/or physically exhausting, and conditions cramped, crowded, dangerous and unhealthy. Written contracts are increasingly rare, and accident insurance is 'voluntary', patchy or unreliable, especially where employers themselves are dodging regulation and taxes. Social security, sick pay, pensions, family or unemployment benefits are all out of the question.

Syrian migrants have had little or no access to trade unions or concerted collective action, apart from a brief period in the late 1970s and early 80s, when sit-ins and strikes were joined in Beirut after the Union of Syrian Arab Workers in Lebanon—a body with genuine organizing capacity—was formed in 1977 and links were forged with Palestinian militias. On the job itself, there are significant degrees of direct subordination, 'flexibility', and mental and occasionally physical abuse. Indeed, amid the luxury and ostentation of downtown Beirut, asphalt is poured, toilets are cleaned, streets swept, garbage collected, customers served, shoes shined, taxis driven, kiosks manned, and shops and homes built by unorganized, insecure, low-skill Syrian labour. They work long hours for little pay, enjoy few social and political rights, often reside in slums and are subject to multiple stigmas and forms of control.

On balance, neither the status of Syrian workers in Lebanon nor their working conditions were improved by the Syrian army's presence. The army was the foundation for the strategic dominance Syria retained after 1991, until its withdrawal under local and international pressure in April 2005. The view among 'pro-Lebanese' was that workers were practically untouchable because of military protection, and in league with Syrian intelligence to boot. However, although the Syrian army protected, in a minimal sense, workers' persons and properties, it also became a significant labour contractor in many sectors, on terms no less exploitative than the norm. Syrian power in Lebanon did not promote any progressive change in workers' conditions, nor did it protect them against disposability and low wages. In the early 1970s, the Asad government did lobby for extended social security and other protections for Syrian migrant workers—a policy the Lebanese always managed to reject—but once in overall control during the 1990s, Damascus made no mention of such demands: Lebanese business would be tapped through deals and levies, official and unofficial, but it would not be antagonized by Syrian support for workers' rights. Indeed, the Syrian

military presence played a key role in the reproduction of the menial and insecure labour regime.

Outside of work, Syrian migrants have scant political rights, and endure high levels of social stigma and dishonour, culminating in violence and fatal incidents at times of crisis. The most recent of these had its origins in the growing hostility to Syrian workers evinced in the press from 1994 onwards, as the sectarian peace continued to hold, and the need for Syrian troops seemed to be evaporating. The Christian-owned daily, *al-Nahar*, published increasingly inflammatory articles exaggerating the numbers of Syrian workers in Lebanon and blaming them for any number of economic, political and social problems. The Israeli withdrawal from the occupied South in May 2000 further reduced the rationale for the Syrian security presence in Lebanon, and the death in June of the Syrian president, Hafez al-Asad, finally eliminated from the scene the powerful 'Sphinx of Damascus'. Amid such political opportunities, words became actions; anti-Syrian demonstrations were organized, and 'Aunist students engaged in various high-profile campaigns, such as selling 'Lebanese' produce on the streets (in place of Syrian vendors). The youth of certain city quarters, notably in Sidon on the coast south of Beirut, prevented Syrians from entering in the wake of crimes allegedly committed by Syrian workers.

With the assassination of former Prime Minister and billionaire Rafiq al-Hariri in February 2005, widely blamed on the Syrian regime, Syrian workers suffered numerous violent, and some fatal, attacks. Many fled, only to trickle back when the crisis was defused after the military withdrawal in April 2005. Evidence from interviews in the summer of that year, and from the press throughout, indicates strongly that hostility towards Syrian workers started to subside during and after the military withdrawal. Even *al-Nahar* started to publish articles conceding that perhaps the Lebanese economy needed this workforce after all. They would flee again, however, especially during the devastating attack on Lebanon by Israel in July–August 2006. Since then, Syrians have started to return for the heavy lifting involved in reconstruction.

A hostile labour regime such as this—familiar in both its economic and coercive aspects to migrant workers in North and South, past and present, from Robin Cohen's 'new helots' to French communism's 'neocolonial subproletariat'—is neither a backward hangover from a traditional past,



nor simply an automatic product of the economic functioning of globalizing capitalism.<sup>18</sup> Instead, the disciplines of commodification are a social production, understood as the way in which persons—inevitably attached, as bearers; to the labour power that they sell—are put to work, disposed of, deployed, exposed to stigma and violence, ‘shoved about, used indiscriminately, or even left unused’.<sup>19</sup> That is, labour regimes cannot be measured against an objective and transhistorical model of ‘pure’ capitalism. Physical force, state power, political parties, collective organization and political ideology, along with patterns of accumulation, attributions of civilization, nation, race and gender, combine in complex ways to produce highly differentiated and finely graded kinds and categories of subaltern workers. As we shall see, this system works through hybridity, pluralization and agency as much as against them.

### *Aspirations and identities*

The Syrian workforce in Lebanon is not, of course, simply a mass of undifferentiated proletarians without independent access to means of production or alternative modes of existence. Workers are not physically coerced to migrate. Instead, their motivations and goals are most commonly focused on survival and subsistence as a matter of necessity, and on autonomy and access to independent means as a matter of ambition. This requires us to look beyond the abstract terminology of ‘stocks’, ‘reserves’ and ‘floating populations’.

Migrants are moved by pressures and social expectations at home, when jobs are simply not available, and families or individuals are indebted or landless; when costs from taxes, housing, health, transport and marriage need to be defrayed, siblings in school require assistance and the old or sick must be provided for. Young male teens in particular come under heavy pressure to find ways to generate the much-needed cash for domestic communities. Only the ‘zeroes’ or ‘less-than-zeroes’ stay behind in the village, as one successful migrant—an Orthodox Catholic from north-west Syria who worked in construction in Lebanon from the late 1950s to the early 2000s—told me. Radwan, a Syrian Kurd from a village

<sup>18</sup> Cohen, *The New Helots*; Gary Freeman, *Immigrant Labor and Racial Conflict in Industrial Societies: The French and British Experience, 1945–1975*, Princeton 1979, pp. 216–58.

<sup>19</sup> Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*, Boston 2001, p. 73.

near Aleppo, who has worked in Lebanon, mostly for grocery stores and supermarkets, since the early 1990s, put it as follows: 'When I go back to Syria, they don't say to me, "What did you eat, what did you drink?" but "How much money did you bring?"' For workers who earn cash for survival and subsistence, subjection to hostile labour regimes is a necessity: something that one must get used to and endure. 'Definitely this is hard work!', insisted Adib Mahrus, a construction worker in Lebanon from the 1970s and concierge in Beirut in the 1990s, who sent his earnings to pay for family subsistence in Syria. 'The Lebanese people, they don't do this kind of work—each to his own. But this hard work is something normal among the poor . . . that you work in pouring concrete. You work at it and you get used to it.'

Beyond survival and subsistence most hope ultimately to achieve some sort of autonomy from bosses, officials and the unmediated operation of market forces. They aspire towards acquiring the wherewithal to marry and start a family, build a house, buy land or invest in some means of production such as a shop, workshop, taxi or minibus, to permit an independent livelihood back in Syria. Such workers also aim to improve their level of material comfort and to raise their status through conspicuous consumption, which here means smarter clothes, household appliances and status items such as watches and mobile phones. Workers accept the rigours and miseries of extensive commodification partly because they can view it as a temporary condition. Saving up and cost-cutting at every turn—on housing, clothes, food or medicine and avoiding the urban temptations of women, gambling and alcohol—is regarded as a mere suspension of normal life, the means to an end. The goal is an independent existence at home that would itself also be a form of social security in the case of unemployment or sickness, as well as providing for retirement and old age.<sup>20</sup>

Success in these goals requires much self-discipline. There are numerous fine gradations of income, security, skill and status, and a plethora of strategies to move up the ladder: learning new skills is the way to improve income according to some, others follow a strict policy of honesty, or set stock by hard work, punctuality and reliability. Respecting oneself and making sure the employer knows that one is not

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<sup>20</sup> A model of the social and economic forces at work in such return migration is thoroughly worked out in Francis Wilson, *Labour in the South African Gold Mines, 1911–1969*, Cambridge 1972, pp. 120–35.

prepared to do 'anything' is another strategy. A common perception, for instance, is that only servile workers such as those from the Hawran, a relatively poor grain-producing region south of Damascus, are ready to wipe the floor under their employer's feet, a willingness which is said to end in their exploitation. Others try to cultivate good relations with particular employers through being 'like a good son', or by becoming indispensable, which can lead to better accommodation (provided by the employer) or better job security. Still others say they know how to treat Lebanese customers and locals, and therefore get small benefits here and there through forms of charity in hard times. Some find that big companies occasionally pay for their children's schooling. Others discover a local private school that they can just afford, while the rest make do with poor government schools; most leave their children in Syria. It is precisely *within* these gradations and forms of heterogeneity that the agency of economic migrants is activated, in attempts to reach the next level. Control does not operate on a homogeneous mass of undifferentiated proletarians, but through the many distinctions that exist among them.

The same mechanism operates in the formation of hybrid identities—the mixing and matching of Lebanese and Syrian identities and practices. Certainly, as cultural studies has emphasized, migration involves the making of new and complex forms of identity. Syrian workers in Lebanon, particularly those who have been there since the early 1990s, let alone since the 1960s, have multiple ways of living their Syrian- or Lebanese-ness. Some recent arrivals, particularly those selling snacks on Beirut's corniche, merely paper their stalls with Lebanese flags in an instrumental attempt to head off stigma and violence. Fresh flags date from particular moments of tension, especially the weeks following al-Hariri's assassination on 14 February 2005. Others integrate, acquiring Lebanese friends and settling into life in Beirut or other towns, and developing attachments to the country. Many are intent on returning to Syria, but once back they look for ways to leave, feeling alienated and bored at home, frustrated and resentful at the lack of opportunities and the pressure of family responsibilities. Others, having lived in Lebanon for years or even decades, can pass for Lebanese, and only an intonation or idiom eventually marks them out as Syrian.

Finally, there are those who are most at home in Lebanon and rarely return. Abed has been in Lebanon more or less continuously since 1963,

working mostly in construction. He lives among Lebanese and Syrian friends in Zarif, Beirut and, like several thousand others in the early 1990s, has acquired Lebanese citizenship. There are even workers, rather unusually, whose ambition was always to relocate entirely to Lebanon. The country is perceived by this group not as a place of lurid temptations but as one of superior amenities: a Maronite from near Tartus listed these as including private cars, advertising posters, cinemas, nightclubs, beaches—'and dollars'.

Such multiple identities and the dynamics they involve are nonetheless shot through with hierarchy and status. This is particularly so when powerful sectors promote vicious stereotypes about Syrian workers, and young Lebanese men patrol the streets of certain quarters ready to beat up and even murder these workers on the basis of their nationality—as occurred in Jeytawi, a lower-middle class Christian neighbourhood of Beirut, in March 2005. Acquiring and seeking Lebanese attributes, under these pressured circumstances, is not only a matter of status but of physical security. In Syria, moreover, returnees are sometimes viewed with a mixture of resentment and admiration. Hearing his accent and seeing the way he dresses, villagers say: 'Abd al-Qadir has become Lebanese'. For 'Abd al-Qadir, who has worked in petty retail in Lebanon since the mid-1990s, this confirms his heightened status—enabling him to marry well, in spite of the resentment. In short, the fine gradations of status implied by multiple ways of living Lebanese-ness are modes of distinction, in Bourdieu's usage, and they activate workers to expend their energies *within* a hierarchical system rather than serving a liberatory function.

### *Men with qualities*

Such distinctions concern not only income and status, but also social identity—nationality, ethnicity, gender and so on. Contrary to the assumptions of economistic Marxism, the quality of the person, not just the exchange value of their labour power measured as a quantity, is vital in constituting particular rates and forms of exploitation.<sup>21</sup> As Bridget Anderson puts it, 'employers want more than labour power,

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<sup>21</sup> Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis showed that such a state of affairs is compatible with a Marxian theory of value in 'The Marxian theory of value and heterogeneous labour: a critique and reformulation', *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, vol. 1, no. 2, (1977), pp 173–92.

they . . . want a particular kind of *person*'.<sup>22</sup> Syrians are 'known' to be docile, hard-working, uncomplaining and ready to follow orders. Such characterizations are overwhelmingly given as reasons for hiring them by the employers who seek them out.<sup>23</sup> Syrians are said to be uneducated and 'backward' or 'rural', qualities which further denote their resilience and exploitability. It is important to note here that multiple identities—rural, Syrian, backward and so on—far from being emancipatory, are aligned and piled up, one on top of the other, to produce an ascription that proves hard to escape. The Lebanese, in contrast, are said to be different. They are 'known' to refuse hard work, to sit behind computers, to work in offices, and to be unused to hard, manual labour. They would not accept, it is said, the kinds of wages paid to Syrians. One commentator suggested that the Lebanese had become lazy during the war because of 'militia culture', and preferred consumption to production.<sup>24</sup> Others roundly declare that 'every Lebanese wants to become President of the Republic'. Palestinians are regarded as something else again: one commonly hears that they are proud and refuse dirty or degrading work. In these ways, then, Syrian nationals are culturally constituted as those who may be commodified and put to work. Labour regimes are therefore segmented by quality; exploitation works through and thrives off these qualitative forms of differentiation, rather than necessarily erasing them.

Syrian workers hold other identities which in employers' eyes, and sometimes their own, render them ready for hard work and exploitation. Syrian Kurds in particular are reputed to be tough and indefatigable workers, their racial stock and minority status in Syria purportedly endowing them with strong constitutions and formidable stamina. As males, moreover, workers are commonly seen as capable of looking after themselves, and suited to hard and strenuous labour, especially if they are young. Norms of manliness tend here to inhibit complaints and help form disciplinary structures. To ask about social insurance provokes responses from employers such as 'Are you here to work or to flirt?', as a Syrian Kurd from near Aleppo, who worked in both radiography and decorating, recalled.

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<sup>22</sup> Bridget Anderson, *Doing the Dirty Work? The Global Politics of Domestic Labour*, London 2000, p. 114. Emphasis in original.

<sup>23</sup> See Khoury's survey of 50 employers in construction, public health and agriculture, 'L'immigration au Liban', vol. 1, p. 202.

<sup>24</sup> Mikhail 'Awwad, *Al-Diyar*, 26 January 1998.

These ascriptions can change, of course, and they cut both ways. Prior to the 1970s, female Syrian Alawis—a minority, heterodox sect of Islam—were widely employed as domestic servants in Lebanese households. They were seen as poor, rural, hard-working, ‘primitive’ and undemanding. But with the sect’s ascendancy in Syria, accompanying the rise to the presidency of the Alawi Hafez al-Asad in 1970, their status was raised and such employment almost completely disappeared. Domestic maids now come predominantly from Sri Lanka and the Far East.<sup>25</sup> Finally, certain Syrians, such as the Dom—gypsy-like groups who often work as unofficial dentists in the Biqa’a valley—are stereotyped as being unreliable, lazy and unfit for hard, manual labour; images which have some impact on their labour regime.<sup>26</sup> As elsewhere, particularism and social identity count for much in differential forms of commodification.

### *Savage gods*

The rigours of commodification are constructed with other cultural materials. Indeed, beyond the seemingly endless focus of cultural studies on identity, conventional economics, or what Mike Davis calls the ‘savage god’ of free-market ‘theology’, also plays an important role.<sup>27</sup> One of the most striking features of the controversy over Syrian workers that raged in the Lebanese press in the late 1990s and early 2000s was its focus on the economy. Pro- and anti-Syrian discourses debated whether migrant labour was positive or negative in economic terms. ‘Pro-Lebanese’ figures argued that the Syrian state was imposing workers by force on a Lebanese economy that was suffering as a result. ‘Pro-Syrian’ commentators argued that Syrian workers were only in Lebanon because of the division of labour and the forces of supply and demand, and hence benefited the economy. These competing visions were at the heart of the media controversy. The unstated assumption here was that if market forces were operating ‘freely’, then this was an unalloyed good.

Such assumptions have a formidable genealogy. Ottoman reformers and French colonial discourse had long before viewed the historic *bilad*

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<sup>25</sup> Ray Jureidini, ‘Migrant Workers and Xenophobia in the Middle East’, UN Research Institute for Social Development, Programme Paper 2 on Identities, Conflict and Cohesion, 2003.

<sup>26</sup> See Giovanni Bochi, ‘The production of difference: sociality, work and mobility in a community of Syrian Dom between Lebanon and Syria’, PhD thesis, LSE 2007.

<sup>27</sup> Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts*, London 2001, p. 35.

*ash-sham* in terms of the value to be extracted from its territory, population and natural resources. Lebanese laissez-faire and Syrian statist developmentalism alike adopted this colonial legacy. From the 1970s, the language of the market economy and the identification of migrants as 'manpower', 'resources' and 'labour supply' were heavily reinforced by the oil boom, and the dominance within academic and policy-making circles of the World Bank and other financial institutions' representations of Middle Eastern migration patterns.<sup>28</sup> Lebanon's economic policy establishment largely consisted, in fact, of economists trained in the neo-classical and monetarist traditions in the United States and Europe.<sup>29</sup>

In this context, the fate of migrant labour was to be subjected to what Claus Offe has called the necessarily 'coercive' implementation of the fiction that labour-power is a commodity'.<sup>30</sup> It would seem that gross reductionism operated not just by chauvinistic stereotypes which flattened complex persons into essentialist caricatures of the 'backward' or the 'rural', or into puppets working as a fifth column for the Syrian regime, but also through reducing complex persons with their own narratives, purposes and identities to the motions of the commodity labour power that they supposedly sell as a matter of choice and contract. These different kinds of reductionism may have produced each other in general terms; essentialism and free-market economics certainly worked together to form and specify those who were to be subject to the disciplines of commodification. These disciplines were therefore, in this case, an effect of the particularism of identity and quality on the one hand, and the universalism of free-market principles on the other.

### *Chains of accumulation*

The restless travel of migration and return has been immensely facilitated by the fact that the Syrian–Lebanese border has basically been open

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<sup>28</sup> For a systematic review of transnational discourses and institutions reducing migrants to 'a factor of production', see Gilbert Beaugé and Alain Roussillon, *Le migrant et son double: migrations et unité arabe*, Paris 1988, pp. 29–65.

<sup>29</sup> For an illustration, consider the career of Nasser Saidi, who taught at the University of Chicago before becoming Vice-Governor of the Central Bank of Lebanon and then Minister of Economy and Trade in the 1990s. See Nasser Saidi, *Growth, Destruction and the Challenges of Reconstruction: Macroeconomic Essays on Lebanon*, Beirut 1999.

<sup>30</sup> Claus Offe, *Disorganized Capitalism: Contemporary Transformations of Work and Politics*, Oxford 1985, pp. 55–7; emphasis in original.

since it was drawn up by the Treaty of Sèvres in 1920. But this freedom of movement has done little to erase distinctions, foster the equilibrium posited by conventional economics, or generate social justice. Perhaps unsurprisingly it is often neoliberal economists, striving to achieve Adam Smith's perfect mobility of labour, who advocate the panacea of open borders.<sup>31</sup> Such a prescription, while appearing radical, ignores the danger that as an isolated measure, de-linked from other transformations, it would produce a racialized, 'threatened and precarious underclass'.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, partly because the borders remain open, Syrians are not forced to choose between the two countries, and so have not settled in significant numbers in Lebanon. There is no established, assertive, second generation of Syrian workers' offspring in Lebanon building a movement to claim citizenship, status and social and political rights. Syrians are still driven to return home; above all by the punishingly high cost of social goods in Lebanon—housing, education, healthcare, utilities, transport and basic commodities—all of which make it extremely difficult for them to settle there with their wives and families. These circumstances echo policies in the global North that strip away social provisions for migrants, thus preventing settlement and forcing new forms of exilic rotation.<sup>33</sup>

This kind of 'travelling culture' is less a celebration of plurality than a matter of dislocation, alienation and fragmentation. Departing migrants are slowly severed from familiar structures of value, community and recognition, and have to endure what a well-known study on the Puerto Rican experience described as the 'pain and sacrifice of dismantling the networks of kinship and sociability that give life meaning'.<sup>34</sup> Migrants can be said to undergo dismemberment—in both figurative and literal senses—by ceasing to be clearly defined members of a known community. Gilbert Beaugé and Alain Roussillon have explored this phenomenon most extensively in the Middle East. Against the conventional

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<sup>31</sup> Nigel Harris, *Thinking the Unthinkable: The Immigration Myth Exposed*, London 2001.

<sup>32</sup> Teresa Hayter, *Open Borders: The Case Against Immigration Controls*, 2nd edition, London 2004, p. xxv.

<sup>33</sup> Grace Chang, *Disposable Domestic: Immigrant Women Workers in the Global Economy*, Cambridge, MA 2000, pp. 4–15; Douglas Massey, J. Edward Taylor, eds, *International Migration: Prospects and Policies in a Global Market*, Oxford 2004, pp. 10–11.

<sup>34</sup> History Task Force, *Labor Migration under Capitalism: The Puerto Rican Experience*, New York 1979, pp. 8, 15.



wisdom that Arab unity has been consolidated by Arab border-crossing, they argue that the 'experience of emigration is expressed by a radical disorganization of all previous schemas of identification such that nothing permits their reconstruction on a new basis'. 'My heart is in the Nile valley, my arms stayed in the Gulf, and my head has left me', explains a 55-year-old Egyptian worker, vividly illustrating the point.<sup>35</sup> The intimate emotions and daily pressures experienced by those left behind, moreover, are formidable, and experienced in terms very distant from liberation.

We should see migrants as being enmeshed in a number of surplus-generating processes, rather than in a single process of capitalist accumulation, with pre-given laws of motion and a singular, identifiable, exploitative bourgeoisie.<sup>36</sup> Migrants themselves, as trusted employees, work as unofficial labour contractors, introducing family members and acquaintances searching for work to employers, for which they may or may not receive a small commission. More established migrants with additional skills in, for example, house painting, are able to contract for work and supervise (Syrian) labour for clients, in some cases charging \$20–25 per diem. Minor Lebanese employers in construction, agriculture, retail, wholesale, manufacturing, tourism and elsewhere employ small numbers of Syrian workers—5 to 10 people—across the country. At the national and regional level, local construction companies and supermarkets, such as Monoprix, Spinneys or the 'Cooperatives' owned by Lebanese or Gulf capital, take on Syrians by the score. Finally, there are the multinationals engaged in large reconstruction projects, using hundreds and even thousands of Syrian workers on a temporary basis. The originally Norwegian but British-based firm Kvaerner, for example, was in the early 1990s awarded the \$60 million contract to rebuild the Beirut Sports Complex, destroyed by the Israeli invasion in 1982. Kvaerner has global interests in shipbuilding, oil, gas, paper and engineering as well as construction. The Lebanon operation employed 30 Britons in senior positions, 200 Lebanese engineers and administrative staff and, at its peak, 1,600 Syrians as 'basic labour'.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Beaugé and Roussillon, *Le migrant et son double*, pp. 106, 108.

<sup>36</sup> For a more general account, see Chalcraft, 'Pluralizing Capital, Challenging Eurocentrism: Toward Post-Marxist Historiography', *Radical History Review* 91 (Winter 2005), pp. 13–39.

<sup>37</sup> Ali Moussa Khalil, 'European Business Interests in Lebanon: An Assessment of EU Private Foreign Direct Investment in the Reconstruction Era', PhD thesis, University of Durham 2000, pp. 217–21.

This is only a schematic view of the major steps in the hierarchy of those who accumulate through the labour of Syrian workers, reaching from the relatively poor to the super-rich, from the slightly favoured or older migrants themselves to the bankers on Wall Street (or in this case London, since the ban on American citizens travelling to Lebanon during much of the 1990s largely excluded US business from the reconstruction process). Between these major steps there are many gradations: the bourgeoisie, both local and transnational, is no monolith, but riddled with cracks and fissures, and divided by forms of internal competition. This is especially so at the multinational level, as companies change hands, relocate, withdraw and restructure at ever increasing speeds. Political and cultural forms, communities and neighbourhoods, social relationships and particular histories, moreover, embed processes of accumulation at every turn.<sup>38</sup> But far from laying the groundwork for emancipation, these gradations and particularities form an entangling web that undergirds the hierarchy itself, and the relentless processes of accumulation under way within it.

Syrian migration to Lebanon, with all its internal differences, is only one link in a chain reaching from wealth at one extreme to poverty at the other. Lebanon has long sent migrants to the Americas, Australia, West Africa and elsewhere. In 2006 such migrants are estimated to have sent back \$5.6 billion in remittances, amounting to a significant component—25.8 per cent—of Lebanon's GDP.<sup>39</sup> Syrians, of course, go to Lebanon. And Syria itself receives migrants from poorer countries such as Sri Lanka and Sudan. The reason for drawing attention to South–South migration here, especially one involving an intermediate link such as that between Syria and Lebanon, is above all to highlight these chains, which have received little systematic attention, but extend from areas and countries producing only for local survival and subsistence to the 'first' world. They have arisen in the context of a post-1945 differentiation within the global South, as new forms of accumulation and dependent development have created sharp divergences in the formerly colonized world. Countries such as Mexico house export processing zones, while Taiwan and South

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<sup>38</sup> For a useful analysis of some of the politics of accumulation in 1990s Lebanon, see Reinoud Leenders, 'Public Means to Private Ends: State Building and Power in Post-War Lebanon', in Eberhard Kienle, ed., *Politics from Above, Politics from Below: The Middle East in the Age of Economic Reform*, London 2003, pp. 304–35.

<sup>39</sup> Osama Habib, 'World Bank puts 2006 remittances at \$5.6 billion', *Daily Star* (Lebanon), 24 March 2007.

Korea have become engines of manufacturing industry; Saudi Arabia and Venezuela have acquired oil wealth, while Lebanon, Malaysia, Argentina or Côte d'Ivoire have become regional hubs. Many migration chains pass through the Middle East: Pakistani workers labour in the fields of Yemen, Yemenis work in the Gulf, and many from the Gulf move to London. Or, to note a chain with four links, Sudanese work in Egypt, Egyptians in Lebanon, Lebanese in Argentina, and Argentinians in North America. Out-migration can draw in labour from elsewhere, and in-migration make out-migration possible.

Such links can also work to lever surplus from the poorer end of the chain to the richer. To give one illustration of how this works: Abu Subhi is a Lebanese who runs a grocery in the Ra's al-Nab'a quarter of Beirut, employing 4 to 6 Syrian workers. He took sufficient profits in 2004, on an annual labour bill totalling \$18,000, to pay a total of \$20,000 per annum for his son's education at a local engineering college and his two daughters' schooling. The son has now gone to Concordia University in Quebec; his training and skills, now exported elsewhere, were in large measure paid for by the disciplined labour of Syrian workers. According to all parties, it was Ibrahim, one of these workers, who had the idea that Abu Subhi set up such a shop in the first place. 'All of this was on our shoulders!' declares Nazir, Ibrahim's brother, who worked under Abu Subhi for four years, bowing his head and touching his shoulders; 'and in the end, what? Nothing! I was fired . . . In Britain don't you have compensation after four years' work?' In this case, Lebanese out-migration was clearly dependent on Syrian in-migration; the latter provided the surplus to make the former possible.

### *Implications*

Excluded from the labour movement, lacking citizenship and social rights, facing stigma and violence, Syrian workers remain intent on escaping from the ranks of the commodified and menial underclass by saving up and acquiring access to means of production and independent means of subsistence. But they pursue these purposes in ways which work to reproduce an overall system of hierarchy, surplus-appropriation and domination. By keeping their heads down, avoiding politics, having 'no opinion' and concentrating on practical gains, migrant workers do not mount a collective challenge to the system but rather play an important role in its reproduction.

To analyse the specific ways in which Syrian workers reproduce the system is one thing; but it is quite another to condemn them as if they were making entirely free choices based on nostalgia, petty-bourgeois individualism or false consciousness. André Gorz argued that this view prevented the labour movement 'from examining the desire for autonomy as a *specifically existential* demand', and led to 'rigidity, dogmatism, wooden language and authoritarianism'.<sup>40</sup> This is trenchant criticism, but if anything it does not go far enough: it downplays the fact that labour movements, which have often ignored, denied or excluded racialized colonial and non-citizen workers, do not define the limits and sum of progressive politics, and makes a problematic distinction between merely existential demands and (presumably) scientifically determined social or economic ones.

The history of Syrian migrants in Lebanon in fact reveals that whenever there was a possibility of making tangible gains from collective action, migrants did organize, as in the late 1970s. In the more pressured context of 2004, however, as Radwan insisted: 'if we went on strike, ten workers would be there to take our place'. Under such conditions, given real constraints, limits, responsibilities and aspirations, there would seem to be no a priori reason for supposing that migrants are incapable of fathoming their own weaknesses and strengths, or of assessing their options in view of the means at their disposal. Intellectuals and activists with greater access to social power should consider how to engage practically with power structures in order to create new opportunities and possibilities for such subaltern groups, rather than urging them to embrace the very proletarian, alienated, oppressive and commodified status that much of their life is devoted to escaping.

In fact, critical and anti-capitalist thought might derive new insights by trying to understand in more detail the choices made by those attempting—often successfully—to extract body and soul from the disciplines of commodification. It is precisely these forms of 'fallen' agency that this contribution has sought to understand. It is not a choice between seeing migrants as either the thoroughly commodified victims of a singular logic of global capitalism, or pioneers who through their agency, border-crossings and forms of hybridity are in the vanguard of

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<sup>40</sup> André Gorz, *Farewell to the Working Class: An Essay on Post-Industrial Socialism*, London 1982, pp. 36–7; emphasis in original.

progressive post-colonial and post-national possibilities. Instead, as the Syrian case illustrates, there are many ways in which hybridity, border-crossing and agency articulate with and even drive forward polarization, hierarchy, alienation and commodification.

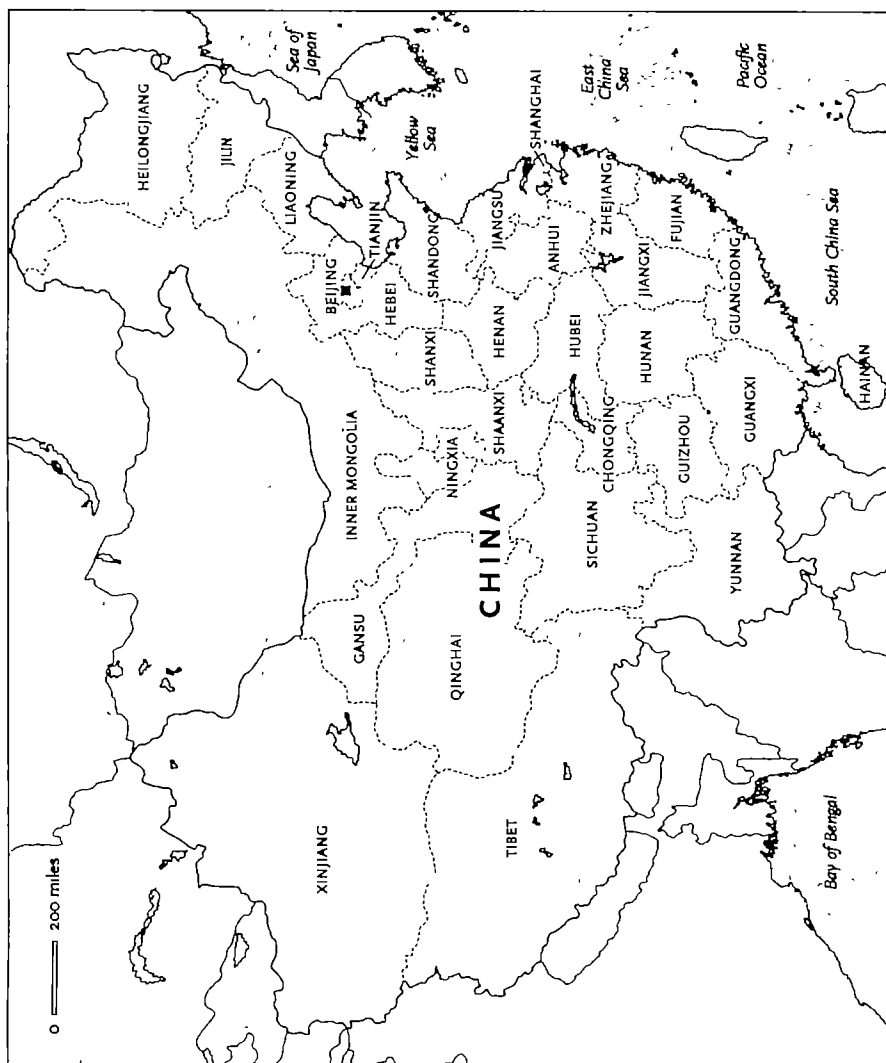
But this does not mean that all such forms of agency are purely complicit and do nothing but reproduce power and profit in a functionalist mode. The very fact that the system requires agency means that, in a context of fracture and instability, this agency might be re-articulated to counter systemic accumulation.<sup>41</sup> For example, the demand for self-determination that drives the search for independent access to the means of subsistence—an old farm, land, ‘a few chickens’, as Gorz puts it, for example—should not simply be dismissed.<sup>42</sup> A genuine reappropriation of the means of existence would remove the person and their labour power from the profit-based market economy, and could potentially be viewed as a seizure of the means of production by other means. Reappropriations of this kind could be linked to global struggles to ‘reclaim the commons’ against ‘accumulation by dispossession’.<sup>43</sup> As such they would represent one strand among the many seeking to combat the hydra of exploitation and control. They might also provide a way for counter-hegemonic practice, rather than demeaning or fetishizing its commodified subjects, to make linkages to existing elements within subaltern practice and ambition.

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<sup>41</sup> For an extended discussion of this view, see Chalcraft and Yaseen Noorani, eds, *Counterhegemony in the Colony and Postcolony*, Houndmills, UK 2007.

<sup>42</sup> Gorz, *Farewell to the Working Class*, pp. 36–7.

<sup>43</sup> David Harvey, *The New Imperialism*, Oxford 2003, Massimo De Angelis, ‘The New Commons in Practice: Strategy, Process and Alternatives’, *Development*, vol. 48, no. 2 (2005), pp. 48–52.



SANJAY REDDY

## DEATH IN CHINA

### *Market Reforms and Health*

CHINA HAS UNDERGONE one of the most impressive processes of rapid development in world history.<sup>1</sup> Between the start of Deng Xiaoping's market-oriented reforms in 1978 and 2005, the annual growth rate of national income, according to World Bank data, averaged 9.7 per cent—amounting to more than a twelvefold increase overall. This unprecedented economic growth has been accompanied by qualitative and structural transformations. Prominent among these has been the increasing international integration of the PRC into the global economy, reflected in the growing share in national income of China's international trade, which rose from 14 per cent to almost 70 per cent over the same period. Though this vertiginous growth has been most marked in the cities and in coastal areas, it has been national in its scope.

One of the most important consequences of this growth has been a substantial reduction in income poverty since 1978: according to official statistics, the proportion of the population that is poor in rural China fell by more than half between 1978 and 1985 alone, and seems to have continued to fall dramatically in the 1990s (although this process has been geographically uneven, with the greatest reductions taking place in the more rapidly growing coastal regions). In 2000, senior government officials even went so far as to declare that absolute poverty had been eliminated. Despite controversies surrounding the number of poor remaining, the sheer quantity of people lifted out of poverty in a short period of time remains a formidable achievement in world-historical terms.

In the light of China's advances in poverty reduction, it is important to assess whether it has made commensurate improvements in other spheres of human well-being, such as education, health and access to basic services. It cannot be assumed that progress has been made in these areas in tandem with the growth of aggregate income—not only because income gains have been very unequally distributed, but because factors other than income are crucially involved. Rising incomes are likely to lead to improved nutrition, housing and sanitation, as well as enabling many to pay for marketized health care. This is the basis on which mainstream economists have advanced the thesis that 'wealthier is healthier'.<sup>2</sup> However, there are grounds for arguing that China's public health infrastructure has been seriously weakened as a result of the withdrawal of state institutions from the provision of health services; the Chinese public is increasingly forced to pay for treatment, and lower state spending has meant the closure of many medical facilities, leaving much of the country's population with little or no access to health care.

Prior to the adoption of the Open Door policy in 1978, the PRC had achieved extraordinary increases in health indicators, despite its low income. Post-revolutionary public health campaigns and preventative health care efforts—for instance, the famous Maoist campaign against the 'four pests': rats, flies, mosquitoes, bedbugs—played an important role. Indeed, China's health achievements continue to surpass, in absolute terms, those of countries at comparable income levels, due to the advances made between 1949 and 1980. China and India, for instance, had similar figures for life expectancy at birth—just above 40 years—in the early 1950s, but by 1962, life expectancy was almost ten years longer in China—54 years to India's 45—and by 1980 the gap had widened to thirteen years: 67 in China, 54 in India.<sup>3</sup> The average life expectancy for all low-income countries was much closer to India's than to

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Camelia Minoiu for her extensive assistance with research for this paper, going well beyond what could be reasonably expected.

<sup>2</sup> Lawrence Summers and Lant Pritchett, 'Wealthier is Healthier', *Journal of Human Resources*, vol. 31, no. 4 (1996), pp. 841–68, rely on cross-country evidence, historical evidence is used by Richard Steckel and Roderick Floud, eds, *Health and Welfare during Industrialization*, Chicago 1997, and Steckel, 'Historical Perspective on the Standard of Living Using Anthropometric Data', in Edward Wolff, ed., *What Has Happened to the Quality of Life in the Advanced Industrialized Nations?*, London 2004, pp. 257–74.

<sup>3</sup> For more on this comparison, see Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen, *Hunger and Public Action*, Oxford 1989.



China's: 44 years in 1962, 52 years in 1980. Such comparisons serve to underline the exceptional character of the PRC's health achievements prior to 1980.

Has health in China continued on this upward trajectory in the last two and a half decades? Is the PRC still achieving more rapid improvements in health than other countries facing similar constraints? My comparative analysis focuses on one measure of health outcomes alone—life expectancy. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, life expectancy provides a conceptually attractive measure of the overall health of a population, since it is an aggregate of mortality risks at different ages and is straightforward to interpret, as the expected life-span of a newborn child who will face these risks. Measures of infant and child survival, although highly informative, do not provide a comprehensive means of gauging the overall health of populations. Moreover, measures of access to health services or of health insurance coverage are difficult to interpret, as they can have very different meanings in different contexts, and refer to health inputs rather than outcomes. Second, estimates of life expectancy are available over a wider span of space and time than other indicators. Figures can be obtained for individual Chinese provinces from the early 1970s to the present, and for a wide range of comparator countries. Limitations on the data available do not allow for a systematic comparison between rural and urban areas; I have therefore adopted a province by province approach, which provides a relatively disaggregated portrait of the health situation in China.<sup>4</sup>

After examining the improvements in life expectancy of Chinese provinces in three distinct decades, I turn to their relative performance compared to other countries. I compare the performance of China as a whole with that of other countries, and assess the record of individual provinces, measuring the best performers against individual comparators. My main findings are fourfold: firstly, province-level rates of improvement in life expectancy were higher in the 1990s than in the 1970s and 1980s, and were lowest in the 1980s, the first decade of market-oriented reforms, during which the Chinese health system was

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<sup>4</sup> Although estimates of China's infant and child mortality rates are available for earlier years, doubt has been cast on their reliability. See Judith Banister and Kenneth Hill, 'Mortality in China 1964–2000', *Population Studies*, vol. 58, no. 1 (2004), pp. 55–75.

drastically transformed. Secondly, even in the 1990s, when the province-level rates of improvement were highest, they were lower than for many countries with similar initial life expectancy levels (although higher than the average for all such countries). Thirdly, China's life expectancy improvement between 1980 and 2000 was achieved much more quickly by almost all other countries considered here, and in particular by most of the lower-middle income countries that achieved similar gains. Analogous conclusions can be drawn after setting China's life expectancy improvements alongside those of two sets of comparators: selected developed countries and high-growth East Asian states. Finally, even those Chinese provinces that performed best over the period in question experienced rates of improvement significantly lower than those of comparator countries. China's recent improvements in health appear, then, to have been notably less impressive than its achievements in poverty reduction.

### *Provincial convergence*

Province-level estimates can be used to measure average annual rates of improvement in male and female life expectancy between 1970 and 2000. These figures are available at four points in time: an average for 1973–75, 1981, 1990 and 2000.<sup>5</sup> I have classified each province as falling into a given 'life expectancy class' on the basis of its life expectancy at the beginning of the relevant decade. These classes are defined as spanning five- or six-year intervals, beginning at 59 years, which is the minimum figure for any province in the entire period. The intervals are held fixed over time, but I have allowed provinces to move from one class to another, so as to take account of initial levels of achievement in each decade (which may have influenced the ease with which additional improvements could be made). Table 1 reports the average annual rates of improvement for provinces within each class—59 to 64 years, 64 to

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<sup>5</sup> Life expectancy figures for 1973–75 and 1981 are from Simona Bignami-Van Assche, 'Estimating Life Expectancy at Birth for China's Provinces, 1975–1990: A Note', Population Studies Center, University of Pennsylvania, mimeo 2005. The figures for 1973–75 are derived from the Cancer Epidemiology Survey undertaken in 1976, which was the largest mortality survey in human history, and recorded all causes of death although its focus was deaths from cancer. The figures for 1981 are taken from census data. Life expectancy figures for 1990 and 2000 are from the *China Statistical Yearbook*, Beijing 2003, Table 4-17, p. 118.

TABLE 1: *Annual rate of improvement in life expectancy (%), 1970–2000*

Decade	Life expectancy class	Average annual rate of growth	
		Male	Female
1970s (21 provinces)	59–64	0.47	0.47
	64–69	0.45	0.53
	69–74	0.09*	0.24
	74–81	–	–
1980s (28 provinces)	59–64	0.14	0.31
	64–69	0.03	0.20
	69–74	0.04	0.10
	74–81	–	0.24
1990s (28 provinces)	59–64	0.58	0.83 <sup>†</sup>
	64–69	0.45	0.46
	69–74	0.35	0.41
	74–81	–	0.31

\* Heilongjiang registered falling male life expectancy from 1973–81, from 69.25 to 67.55 years

<sup>†</sup> High improvements in female life expectancy among provinces in the class 59–64 were registered in the 1990s in Xinjiang (9.9 per cent), Qinghai (9.3 per cent) and Tibet (7.4 per cent)

69 years, 69 to 74 years and 74 to 81 years—for each of the decades considered.<sup>6</sup>

For almost every life expectancy class, the rate of improvement was highest in the 1990s, followed by that in the 1970s; in the 1980s, by contrast, there were meagre improvements. Life expectancy increased for every province in each decade (with the notable exception of Heilongjiang, where male life expectancy fell from 69.25 to 67.55 years between 1973–75 and 1981). The higher average rates of improvement of provinces in the lowest classes suggest a pattern of ‘catch-up’ or ‘convergence’.

<sup>6</sup> Each class consists of ages higher than the first figure specified, and less than or equal to the second. Admittedly, these intervals are defined in an ad hoc manner. Moreover, different levels of absolute increase in life expectancy can be associated with the same proportionate increase for different provinces within the same class, since each class spans a number of years. A different definition of the life expectancy classes might lead to different conclusions.

TABLE 2: *Average annual rate of improvement in life expectancy (%), 1990s*

	<i>Initial LE class</i>	<i>Chinese provinces</i>	<i>All countries in class</i>	<i>Best performers</i>		<i>Worst performers</i>	
<i>Males</i>	59–64	0.58	0.34	El Salvador	0.84	Russia	–0.78
	64–69	0.45	0.19	Oman	0.72	Azerbaijan	–0.82
	69–74	0.35	0.30	US Virgin Is	0.72	Barbados	0.07
	74–81	–	0.25	Sweden	0.34	Honduras	0.10
<i>Females</i>	59–64	0.83	0.66	Maldives	1.26	Iraq	–0.03
	64–69	0.46	0.31	Egypt	0.78	South Africa	–2.79
	69–74	0.41	0.20	St. Kitts & Nevis	0.60	Marshall Is	–0.74
	74–81	0.31	0.19	Dominica	0.45	Azerbaijan	–0.82

China's superior achievements in the 1990s as compared to the previous two decades might simply be due to the passage of time: health improvements may have become easier to bring about in the 1990s owing to advances in knowledge and experience. For this reason, it is instructive to compare the average health achievements of Chinese provinces with those of countries within the same initial life expectancy class for a single time period, 1990–2000. The underlying premise is that any technological factors aiding China's health improvements in the 1990s relative to the 1970s are likely to have had a similar impact on comparator countries. For each class, I have identified the group of countries with life expectancy figures within the same five-year bracket (for males and females respectively) in 1990. Table 2 shows the average improvement for all countries in the group of comparators assembled in this way, as well as the rates of improvement for the best and worst performing countries in the group.

Throughout the 1990s, Chinese provinces on average had higher improvements in male and female life expectancy than countries in the same life expectancy class. However, the average improvement of Chinese provinces in any given class was both notably lower than the best performing comparator, and notably higher than the worst. India—perhaps the most appropriate comparator for China by virtue of its large population and internal diversity—falls in the lowest life expectancy class, and

during the same period saw an improvement which was higher than that of Chinese provinces for males (0.71 per cent versus 0.58 per cent for China) but lower for females (0.54 per cent for India versus China's 0.83 per cent).

These findings should be interpreted with caution for a number of reasons. Factors such as levels of real income, of public investment in health, and epidemiological developments (such as increases in the prevalence of HIV-AIDS) may have a significant impact on health outcomes; omitting them from the analysis can lead to incorrect conclusions concerning the achievements of Chinese provinces relative to countries with similar characteristics. However, the lack of adequate provincial-level data from China means we cannot directly control for these factors. In order partially to address the neglect of such variables, I now turn to a comparison of China's national improvement in life expectancy with that of other countries.

### *International parallels*

To place China's record between 1980 and 2000 in comparative perspective, I have selected two sets of countries spanning a range of circumstances. The first set of comparators comprises all lower-middle income countries, as designated by the World Bank.<sup>7</sup> The second contains three developed nations—the US, UK and Japan—and three fast-growing East Asian economies: Hong Kong, South Korea and Taiwan. The second set provides comparisons with countries which historically achieved similar improvements in life expectancy (with the benefit of already high incomes, but the handicap of an earlier period's knowledge of medicine and public health); and with countries that are similar to China in two ways: they are in the same region, and have recently experienced rapid economic growth. India does not appear in this analysis because it had not reached China's 1981 life expectancy level by 2003.

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<sup>7</sup> Countries are assigned to the lower-middle income group based on their 2004 per capita GDP ranking; see *World Development Indicators 2006*, available online. Between 1980 and 2000, China moved from the low income category to the lower-middle group. It might be thought that low-income countries are therefore the appropriate set of comparators for China. However, none of these countries achieved China's 2000 male or female life expectancy by 2004, and very few achieved even China's 1981 level by the end of the period.

TABLE 3: *Life expectancy: China v. selected lower-middle income countries*

## A: Male

Country	Initial LE	Year China's 1981 LE reached	End LE	Year China's 2000 LE reached	Percentage increase	Years needed
Cuba	67.0	1967	69.4	1972	3.58	5
Tunisia	68.6	1990	69.7	1996	1.60	6
Ecuador	66.7	1990	69.7	1997	4.50	7
Syria	66.9	1995	70.0	1997	4.70	7
Colombia	66.1	1995	69.4	2003	5.07	8
Jordan	66.3	1990	69.8	2002	5.41	12
Bos. & Herz.	67.4	1977	69.4	1990	2.94	13
Azerbaijan	66.6	1989	69.4	2002	4.20	13
Sri Lanka	66.5	1982	69.9	1995	5.12	13
Tonga	66.5	1980	69.6	1995	4.77	15
Jamaica	66.7	1970	69.5	1987	4.30	17
<b>China</b>	<b>66.4</b>	<b>1981</b>	<b>69.6</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>4.82</b>	<b>19</b>
Albania	66.0	1972	69.5	1995	5.30	23
Serb. & Mont.	66.8	1972	69.6	1995	4.19	23

## B: Female

Syria	70.2	1990	73.2	1997	4.33	7
Tunisia	72.1	1990	74.1	1998	2.77	8
Ecuador	69.9	1987	74.1	1995	6.06	8
Albania	69.5	1972	73.0	1982	5.04	10
Bos. & Herz.	69.5	1972	73.4	1982	5.61	10
Sri Lanka	69.7	1980	73.7	1990	5.79	10
Cuba	70.2	1967	74.8	1977	6.55	10
Jordan	69.5	1992	73.3	2004	5.44	12
Colombia	70.2	1982	73.8	1995	5.05	13
Serb. & Mont.	69.8	1970	73.3	1985	4.96	15
Azerbaijan	69.0	1962	73.2	1979	6.09	17
<b>China</b>	<b>69.4</b>	<b>1981</b>	<b>73.3</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>5.74</b>	<b>19</b>
Tonga	69.5	1982	73.4	2001	5.58	19
Jamaica	69.3	1967	73.3	1990	5.80	23

For each group of comparators, I have calculated whether it took the countries concerned fewer, as many, or more years to achieve the improvement in life expectancy recorded by China between 1980 and 2000. The initial and final life expectancy levels are held fixed for each country. Table 3 shows the annual rate of improvement for each sex, as a percentage, as well as the number of years taken to bring about the change, for a selected group of comparator countries. As can be seen, the corresponding figures for China place it near the bottom of the resulting league table.

A large number of lower-middle income countries could not be included in Table 3A, either because they had not achieved China's 1981 male life expectancy (66.43) by 2004, the last year for which a comprehensive set of indicators is available, or because they had attained it between 1960 and 2003, but had not achieved China's 2000 figure (69.63) by the end of the period considered.<sup>8</sup> The former group of countries can be concluded to have performed less well than China in absolute terms. However, their improvements over the decades in question are not straightforwardly comparable with those of the PRC. For the second group of countries, the results are more ambiguous. Some had attained China's 1981 male life expectancy long before 1981, but were unable to reach its 2000 figure over the next four decades.

China took longer to increase its male life expectancy (from 66.4 to 69.6 years) than most of the comparator countries listed in Table 3A. The only exceptions are Albania and Serbia and Montenegro, which took more than two decades to achieve a comparable increase in male life expectancy, from a similar starting point. Although these countries were slower in attaining China's 2000 level, they had reached its 1981 figure in the early 1970s. Since it may have been more difficult to achieve the same health outcomes in the past, the performances of Albania and

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<sup>8</sup> The former group of countries consists of Bolivia, Djibouti, Dominican Republic, Fiji, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, Indonesia, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Kiribati, Namibia, Swaziland and Turkmenistan. The latter group comprises Angola, Armenia, Belarus, Brazil, Cape Verde, Egypt, El Salvador, Georgia, Maldives, Micronesia, Morocco, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Romania, Samoa, Suriname, Thailand, Ukraine and Vanuatu. There is no data prior to 1987 for Macedonia and the Marshall Islands, and Bulgaria had achieved China's 1981 male life expectancy before 1960. These three countries have therefore been eliminated from the analysis, which includes only those states for which both female and male figures are available.

Serbia and Montenegro may not be straightforwardly deemed inferior to that of China.

The results of the analogous exercise for female life expectancy are reported in Table 3B. A number of lower-middle income countries not included in the table have been outperformed absolutely by China. These states—Angola, Bolivia, Djibouti, Guyana, Iraq, Kiribati, Maldives, Micronesia, Namibia, Swaziland and Turkmenistan—had not reached China's 1981 female life expectancy of 69.35 by 2004. The comparative data once again show China's performance to have been relatively modest. It ranks in the lower half of the group of lower-middle income countries which attained the two benchmarks at some point between 1960 and 2004, and has been outperformed by many countries in that income category. For instance, Brazil and Thailand (not shown in the table) took ten and sixteen years, respectively, to make comparable advances in female life expectancy.<sup>9</sup>

Measured against the second set of comparators—selected developed countries and fast-growing East Asian economies—China's performance has also been modest at best (see Table 4). While it took the PRC almost two decades to improve male life expectancy from 66 to 69 years, four of the comparator countries had achieved this in only one decade—and, with the exception of South Korea, did so earlier than China. Moreover, though the US and UK took slightly more than two decades to make the same improvements, they cannot straightforwardly be said to have performed less well than China, since they made these gains in a period when health improvements would have been more difficult to achieve. These findings are further supported by the ranking for female life expectancy, in which China appears at the bottom of the league table. It took two decades for the PRC's figure to improve from 70 to 74 years. In contrast, Japan, the UK, Taiwan and South Korea made the same advance in seven to ten years, and did so much earlier: Japan in the 1960s, the UK in the 1950s, Taiwan in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and South Korea in the 1980s.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Though not shown here, the figures for total life expectancy for specific comparator countries point to similar conclusions, they are available from the author upon request.

<sup>10</sup> The results are not reported, but are available from the author upon request.



TABLE 4: *Male life expectancy: China v. selected countries*

Country	Initial LE	Year China's 1981 LE reached	End LE	Year China's 2000 LE reached	Percentage increase	Years needed
Hong Kong	66.7	1968	69.6	1976	4.29	8
Japan	66.2	1962	69.4	1970	4.79	8
South Korea	66.9	1990	69.8	2000	4.43	10
Taiwan	66.3	1969	69.6	1980	4.98	11
China	66.4	1981	69.6	2000	4.82	19
USA	66.4	1957	69.6	1978	4.82	21
UK	66.7	1952	69.8	1976	4.65	24

In comparative perspective, then, the health of China's population appears to have improved less rapidly than that of other countries. Even in its own income category, the PRC seems not to have performed especially well. These conclusions give rise to yet another question: although China as a whole may not have outperformed any of the comparator countries, are there any individual Chinese provinces which did so?

### *Star performers?*

The rate at which life expectancy improved in China's provinces varied greatly in the twenty years after the initiation of market-oriented reforms. As can be seen from Table 5 (overleaf), Xinjiang registered an improvement of 8.99 per cent over 1981–2000, whereas Guangxi and Guangdong recorded declines of 1.07 and 0.85 per cent. These disparities, however, reflect different starting positions. It is clear that the highest rates of improvement occurred in those provinces with the lowest initial life expectancy, and that provinces with higher initial levels experienced more modest increases; in provinces such as Beijing, Shanghai and Guangdong, which gained the most in economic terms in this period, and which had previously achieved high levels of life expectancy, the improvements were relatively small. An assessment of the performance of Chinese provinces requires the use of comparators with similar starting points.

TABLE 5: *Total life expectancy in China by province*

<i>Province</i>	<i>1981 LE</i>	<i>2000 LE</i>	<i>Percentage improvement</i>
Xinjiang	61.85	67.41	8.99
Sichuan	65.53	71.20	8.65
Guizhou	62.21	65.96	6.03
Shaanxi	66.15	70.07	5.93
Qinghai	62.40	66.03	5.82
Hubei	67.46	71.08	5.37
Hunan	67.15	70.66	5.23
Yunnan	62.24	65.49	5.22
Ningxia	66.80	70.17	5.04
Jilin	69.87	73.10	4.62
Heilongjiang	69.45	72.37	4.20
Zhejiang	71.74	74.70	4.13
Tianjin	72.15	74.91	3.83
Shanghai	75.37	78.14	3.68
Shanxi	69.13	71.65	3.65
Beijing	73.56	76.10	3.45
Shandong	71.76	73.92	3.01
Jiangsu	71.90	73.91	2.80
Inner Mongolia	68.07	69.87	2.64
Fujian	70.95	72.55	2.26
Jiangxi	67.60	68.95	2.00
Liaoning	72.10	73.34	1.72
Anhui	70.90	71.85	1.34
Gansu	66.85	67.47	0.93
Hebei	72.10	72.54	0.61
Henan	71.58	71.54	-0.06
Guangdong	73.90	73.27	-0.85
Guangxi	72.06	71.29	-1.07
Chongqing*	—	71.73	—
Hainan†	—	72.92	—
Tibet	—	64.37	—

\* Chongqing was a city within Sichuan province until 1997, when it became an independent municipality

† Hainan was part of Guangdong province from 1921 to 1988

The provinces with the fastest growth in total life expectancy between 1980 and 2000 were Guizhou, Sichuan and Xinjiang. How do their performances measure against those of comparator countries over the same period? Table 6 summarizes the achievements of these three provinces relative to selected comparators.

TABLE 6: *Total life expectancy: three Chinese provinces v. selected comparators*

Province or country	Initial LE	Year province's		Year province's		Percentage increase	Years needed
		1981 LE reached	End LE	2000 LE reached			
South Korea	61.44	1972	65.52	1977	6.64	5	
Costa Rica	61.86	1960	65.66	1967	6.14	7	
Sri Lanka	62.60	1965	66.71	1977	6.57	12	
USA	62.10	1932	65.90	1945	6.12	13	
Guizhou	62.21	1981	65.96	2000	6.03	19	
Costa Rica	65.66	1967	71.05	1977	8.21	10	
South Korea	65.52	1977	71.77	1995	9.54	18	
Sichuan	65.53	1981	71.20	2000	8.65	19	
Sri Lanka	65.37	1972	71.36	1995	9.16	23	
USA	65.20	1944	71.20	1972	9.20	28	
South Korea	61.44	1972	67.72	1982	10.22	10	
Costa Rica	61.86	1960	68.10	1972	10.09	12	
USA	62.10	1932	67.20	1948	8.21	16	
Sri Lanka	61.14	1962	67.63	1980	10.61	18	
Xinjiang	61.85	1981	67.41	2000	8.99	19	

Guizhou and Xinjiang rank last in the lists of comparators. It took these provinces two decades to increase total life expectancy from 62 to 66 years. In contrast, Sichuan did better than Sri Lanka and the US, although it was outperformed by Costa Rica and South Korea. Thus even the best performing Chinese provinces did not notably outdo the comparators.

Comparative historical analysis demonstrates that China's recent progress in health is less remarkable than its record in reducing

income poverty. The growth of both its female and male life expectancy between the chosen benchmarks was much slower than that of selected comparators—the US, UK, Japan, Hong Kong, South Korea and Taiwan—despite China having the advantage of undertaking these advances later, with the benefit of greater medical knowledge and experience of public health. Furthermore, China's performance relative to countries in its own income class—the lower-middle category—has been unimpressive.

### *Causes and consequences*

These findings echo those of other recent studies. In 2005, Giovanni Cornia and Leonardo Menchini concluded that China's rates of improvement in life expectancy were lower than those of East Asia and the Pacific region as a whole in every decade other than the 1960s, and fell below the world average in the 1990s. They observed a similar trend for infant mortality, noting that China's advances were again outpaced by those of high income countries and other East Asian and Pacific states.<sup>11</sup> Analysing patterns of spatial inequality in education and health in China, Xiaobo Zhang and Ravi Kanbur show that the ratio of rural to urban infant mortality rates increased from 1.65 to 2.8 between 1981 and 2000. They argue that the widening gap can partially be explained by growing relative differences in access to health care, as measured by rural and urban ratios of personnel and hospital beds to population. The number of medical staff per 1,000 people dropped from 1.81 in 1980 to 1.71 in 1998; the figure for hospital beds went from 1.48 per 1,000 to 1.11 per 1,000 over the same period in rural areas.<sup>12</sup> Meanwhile, the share of recurrent health expenditure accounted for by personal spending has more than trebled, from 18 per cent in 1982 to 61 per cent in 2001. Increasing disparities in income, utilization of, and access to health care have also been documented by scholars using data from national surveys.<sup>13</sup>

There are likely to have been many reasons for the imbalance between China's remarkable increases in average income and dramatic poverty

<sup>11</sup> Giovanni Cornia and Leonardo Menchini, 'The pace and distribution of health improvements during the last 40 years: some preliminary results', paper presented at the 'Forum on Human Development', Paris, 17–19 January 2005, Tables 5 and 7.

<sup>12</sup> Xiaobo Zhang and Ravi Kanbur, 'Spatial Inequality in Education and Health Care in China', *CEPR Discussion Paper* no. 4136 (2003).

<sup>13</sup> Yuanli Liu, William Hsiao and Karen Eggleston, 'Equity in health and health care: the Chinese experience', *Social Science and Medicine*, vol. 49 (1999), pp. 1349–56.

reduction on the one hand, and its lesser record of health improvements on the other. For example, the mechanisms linking rising incomes to improved health may have had diminishing effect over time. Using survey data for urban China, Xin Meng, Xiaodong Gong and Youjuan Wang have argued that nutritional intake worsened for lower income groups during the 1990s. In their assessment, the leading causes of this phenomenon were the rise in food prices between 1993 and 1996 induced by the liberalization of the grain marketing system, and the abolition of the food coupon system by most provinces in 1993.<sup>14</sup> In any event, the health benefits of improved nutrition, as well as of other measures such as education, child vaccination and better water and sanitation, may have been largely exhausted. The most important factor is likely to have been the breakdown of China's existing public health infrastructure, and a consequent rationing of health resources according to citizens' ability to pay. Both the press and academic literature have widely remarked on the growing gulf between the health care available to China's new wealthy and what its poor can afford; the relative deprivation of the latter has been compounded by the absolute financial burdens ill-health now imposes.<sup>15</sup>

The roots of the breakdown lie in the diminished economic role of the rural agricultural communes and urban public-sector enterprises on which the health system had previously depended for financing and administration.<sup>16</sup> The famous barefoot doctors, who had provided basic care through village and township medical centres since the 1950s, were dispersed in the early 1980s, and the public health system has since taken on a largely residual role. User fees have been formally implemented, as well as being informally levied in countless cases. Such costs often act as a steep barrier to the use of health facilities, even when these are

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<sup>14</sup> Xin Meng, Xiaodong Gong and Youjuan Wang, 'Impact of Income Growth and Economic Reform on Nutrition Intake in Urban China: 1986–2000', *IZA Institute for the Study of Labour Discussion Paper* no. 1448 (2004).

<sup>15</sup> See Yuanli Liu, 'What is Wrong with China's Health System?', *Harvard China Review*, March 2006; Howard French, 'Wealth Grows, but Health Care Withers in China', *New York Times*, 14 January 2006; Louisa Lim, 'The High Price of Illness in China', BBC News website, 2 March 2006; and Matthew Forney, 'China's Failing Health System', *Time*, 12 May 2003.

<sup>16</sup> See Yasheng Huang, 'Private Sector Development and Health Care Contributions in China', presented at Harvard Business School and Harvard School of Public Health conference, New Delhi, 25 March 2006; and Liu, 'What is Wrong with China's Health System?'.

supposed to be accessible to the general public. Hospital-based studies suggest that even where exemptions for the poor exist in principle, they are nevertheless not applied in practice. As a result, the less well-off increasingly go without health care altogether.

In recent years, both state- and private-sector employers—the latter playing an increasingly central role in the Chinese economy—have been required to provide workers with ‘medical savings accounts’ to cover health care costs. However, many private firms have not complied with the legislation, and even public-sector and quasi-public sector enterprises have refused to meet their obligations, amid increasing budgetary constraints and intensifying pressures for market survival. The large population of illegal internal migrant workers—estimated by the Chinese Agriculture Ministry to number up to 115 million—generally has no access to publicly provided health care.<sup>17</sup> Survey evidence shows that at most a quarter of the entire Chinese population, and a much smaller proportion of rural inhabitants, possesses some form of health insurance. Moreover this coverage is often nominal and may be insufficient to meet needs. Pharmaceutical costs have also been rising, although price ceilings and increased competition in hospital procurement have recently been introduced as a means of countering this trend; drugs continue to be prescribed heavily, however, as they are a major source of revenue for hospitals and health centres. Hospital profits increased by 70 per cent between 2000 and 2003, despite a reduction in patient visits of 5 per cent; personal spending, at 61 per cent of all health care expenditure, dwarfs the government share of only 17 per cent.<sup>18</sup> In this context, it is unsurprising that studies of the dynamics of poverty in China suggest

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<sup>17</sup> *Migration News*, vol. 14, no. 1 (2007).

<sup>18</sup> Lim, ‘High Price of Illness’. The literature on the complex institutional background to China’s health system is extensive; for a concise overview, see David Blumenthal and William Hsiao, ‘Privatization and Its Discontents—the Evolving Chinese Health Care System’, *New England Journal of Medicine*, vol. 353, no. 11 (Sept 2005), pp. 1165–70. For further data, see WHO and Government of China, *China: Health, Poverty and Economic Development*, Beijing 2006; see also four World Bank reports: Mariam Claeson, Hong Wang and Shanlian Hu, *A Critical Review of Public Health in China*; Yuanli Liu, Zhengzhong Mao and Brian Nolan, *China’s Rural Health Insurance and Financing: A Critical Review*; Gordon Liu, Brian Nolan and Chen Wen, *Urban Health Insurance and Financing in China*; Peter Smith, Christine Wong and Yuxin Zhao, *Public Expenditure and Resource Allocation in the Health Sector in China*, all Washington, DC 2004.

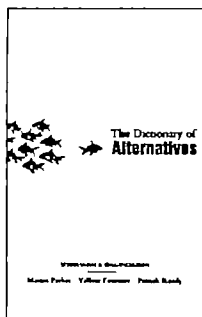
that catastrophic and chronic illnesses have become a major reason for downward mobility and persistent poverty, especially in rural areas.

It is also not surprising that the weaknesses of China's health system, and the increasing dependence of health upon private income and wealth, have caused concern at the highest levels of the PRC leadership—not only because of the inherent importance of health, but also because of the potential challenge posed by these developments to the legitimacy of the regime. There is today an active debate in the Chinese intelligentsia and political class on alternative approaches to providing for comprehensive health insurance, and a number of possibilities are being practically explored. For instance, in 2003 China launched the New Rural Cooperative Medical Insurance programme, which aims to provide a mechanism for universal health insurance in rural areas through voluntary paid membership, though its coverage remains limited.

In September 2004, the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party endorsed the concept of a 'harmonious society'—signalling an increasing concern that the CCP should be seen to be addressing the evident imbalances between social goals and economic growth. China's health achievements remain considerable, as indicated by its continuing lead in life expectancy, in absolute terms, over countries with similar levels of real income per capita. However, this favourable position reflects its advances prior to 1980 much more than it does any improvements since. As long as its economic trajectory is not fundamentally disrupted, China is unlikely to face a collapse in health indicators on the scale of Russia's catastrophic post-Soviet slump. It is, however, entirely possible that the present health inequalities will become entrenched, making further improvements difficult. The weakness of its public health infrastructure also leaves China potentially vulnerable to crises such as the SARS epidemic or avian influenza. The impact of China's market reforms provides a clear indication that 'the rapid privatization of health care systems carries enormous risks for the health of citizens and the stability of governments.'<sup>19</sup> China's leadership should revitalize its public health infrastructure, ensuring access to services for all, if it is to move towards its stated goal of a 'harmonious society', and close the growing divide separating the rich and healthy from the poor and infirm.

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<sup>19</sup> Blumenthal and Hsiao, 'Privatization and Its Discontents', p. 1170.



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## EXPERIMENTAL VALUES

### *Indian Clinical Trials and Surplus Health*

**T**WO PROMINENT INDIAN physicians recently described the clinical trials of new drugs in India as a 'new colonialism'. In an article published by a leading US medical journal, Samiran Nundy and Chandra Gulhati drew particular attention to 'illegal and unethical trials' conducted without regulatory approval.<sup>1</sup> But a moral critique of this kind, however legitimate in its own terms, does not adequately grasp the network of economic and social relations that the international health industry has established on a global scale. Even if all clinical trials conducted in India or other Third World countries adhered to the letter of the law and the spirit of ethical codes, the very structure of this network would remain one of exploitation. I shall outline here the dynamics of clinical trials in India, focusing especially on the huge capacity currently being built up in anticipation of the transfer of global trials to the subcontinent. This will provide a basis for interpreting the phenomenon in terms of concepts developed by myself and others currently researching this field, particularly those of *biocapital* and *surplus health*.

#### I. THE LANDSCAPE OF CLINICAL TRIALS

Clinical trials are the set of practices required to certify a new drug molecule as safe and efficacious for the market.<sup>2</sup> In the United States, the clinical-trials procedure is an elaborate one, conducted in a number of stages and contributing to the immense time, risk and expense of the drug development process. First, there is pre-clinical toxicological testing of a potential new drug molecule. This is usually performed on animals,

in order to determine whether the molecule being tested is safe enough to put into a living system. The second stage is that of dosage studies, designed to come up with a metric for the dose of the drug to be administered. Predictably, the efficacy of a drug increases with its dose, but so too does its toxicity; the aim is therefore to find an optimum range within which efficacy is maximized without too greatly compromising safety. If the drug is too toxic when tried on animals, the trial will not proceed any further, but if acceptable dose ranges can be determined, the third stage is a three-phase trial in humans. Phase 1 trials are conducted on a small number of healthy volunteers to test the drug's basic safety, since drugs that seem safe in animals may still show adverse effects in humans. Phase 2, which serves as a bridge, involves larger, scaled-up efficacy and safety trials on as many as a few hundred subjects, who may be either patients or healthy individuals. Phase 3 involves large-scale randomized trials on several thousand people, usually patients suffering from the ailment for which the therapy has been developed. These trials are frequently coordinated across multiple centres, increasingly on a global scale.

The sponsors for trials are generally biotechnology or pharmaceutical companies, since drug development in the US and most other parts of the world is undertaken largely by the private sector. Universities and publicly funded laboratories play a major role in the early stages of discovery—the identification of potential lead molecules and the conduct of pre-clinical tests—but the institutional structure of drug development is such that they increasingly license promising molecules to corporations that take them through clinical trials. This means that the biomedical and experimental rationales for clinical trials are completely

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<sup>1</sup> Samiran Nundy and Chandra Gulhati, 'A New Colonialism?—Conducting Clinical Trials in India', *New England Journal of Medicine*, vol. 352, no. 16 (2005), pp. 1633–6.

<sup>2</sup> Clinical trials have become a site of keen interest in the anthropology of science. See especially Melinda Cooper, Brian Salter and Amanda Dickens, 'China and the Global Stem Cell Bioeconomy: An Emerging Political Strategy?', *Regenerative Medicine*, vol. 1, no. 5 (2006); Joseph Dumit, *Drugs for Life*, Durham, NC forthcoming; Jill Fisher, 'Human Subjects in Medical Experiments', in Sal Restivo, ed., *Science, Technology and Society*, Oxford 2005; Wen-Hua Kuo, 'Japan and Taiwan in the Wake of Bio-Globalization: Drugs, Race and Standards', PhD dissertation, MIT 2005; Adriana Petryna, 'Ethical Variability: Drug Development and Globalizing Clinical Trials', *American Ethnologist*, vol. 32, no. 2 (2005), pp. 183–97; and Petryna, 'Drug Development and the Ethics of the Globalized Clinical Trial', Princeton Institute for Advanced Study Occasional Paper 22 (Oct 2005).

entwined with the market value these companies see in the drugs that eventually get developed, and the market risk that attends the drug development process. According to the Healthcare Financial Management Association's newsletter, 'twenty years ago, 80 per cent of clinical research trials were conducted through academic medical centres. In 1998, estimates indicated the number of [these] centres as investigator sites had dropped to less than half.'<sup>3</sup> Health research and production is thus progressively captured by capital, and now needs to be seen as a semi-autonomous branch of it.<sup>4</sup> The organizational complexity of clinical trials does however mean that it has been hard for pharmaceutical companies to manage them, leading to the emergence of an entirely new sector devoted to the management and administration of clinical trials. These companies, known as clinical research organizations (CROs), are now an integral part of the overall biomedical economy.

### *A plurality of actors*

The movement of clinical trials to international—non-US—locations started in earnest in the mid-1990s. Adriana Petryna cites figures that point to a dramatic growth in the number of human subjects recruited into these trials, from 4,000 in 1995 to 400,000 in 1999.<sup>5</sup> A recent study by the consulting firm A. T. Kearney shows that roughly half of the 1,200 US clinical trials in 2005 made use of an international site.<sup>6</sup> In the 1990s, as Petryna notes, most of this growth occurred in countries that had agreed to harmonize standards in commercial drug testing with the guidelines set by the International Conference on Harmonization of

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<sup>3</sup> Indeed, law and policy scholars Tracy Lewis, Jerome Reichman and Anthony So have argued for public funding of clinical trials as a crucial mechanism to make essential therapeutics more accessible—and therefore to move health away from being an abstract market value towards being about healthiness. See Tracy Lewis, Jerome Reichman and Anthony So, 'The Case for Public Funding and Public Oversight of Clinical Trials', *The Economists' Voice*, vol. 4, no. 1 (2007). For the Healthcare Financial Management Association's figures, see Jennifer Jones and Alan Zuckerman, 'Clinical Research Trials: Creating Competitive and Financial Advantages', *Managing the Margin Newsletter*, available at [www.hfma.org](http://www.hfma.org).

<sup>4</sup> This is an example of what Etienne Balibar has described as the continual expansion of the value form and the infinite process of accumulation. Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*, London and New York 1992, p. 180.

<sup>5</sup> Petryna, 'Drug Development'.

<sup>6</sup> A. T. Kearney Report, 'Make Your Move: Taking Clinical Trials to the Best Location', 2006; available at [www.atkearney.com](http://www.atkearney.com).

Technical Requirements for Registration of Pharmaceuticals for Human Use. These primarily included Latin American and Eastern European countries, but not yet India. Over the past two years, however, India has become one of the most dynamic sites for the establishment and growth of clinical research.

In India, a range of local actors currently see the country as providing an extremely attractive destination for outsourced clinical trials from the West. Contract research in the Indian pharmaceutical industry is already robust, and was estimated by the Chemical Pharmaceutical Generic Association to be worth between \$100 and \$120 million in 2005, while growing at 20 to 25 per cent per year.<sup>7</sup> A further influx of global clinical trials is eagerly awaited. Who are these actors, and upon what do they base their expectations?

The most central, perhaps, are members of the burgeoning CRO industry. These are the most immediate beneficiaries of trials coming to India, and are therefore keen to create conditions for these trials to grow in a sustained and streamlined fashion. CROs are the major drivers of the build-up of clinical-research infrastructure, and particularly influential in building a regulatory framework for the conduct of trials. It is estimated that there are approximately a hundred CROs of reasonable size operating in the country at the moment. Some of these are fairly well established, with a couple being fifteen to twenty years old. A number of the better-known CROs were seeded in the late 1990s; many, however, have emerged only in the very recent past.

The Indian pharmaceutical industry is another interested party. It is in the process of retooling its business model in the wake of India's signing of the patent regime imposed by the WTO. Indian patent laws formerly allowed only process and not product patents on therapeutic molecules. This meant that one could not patent a drug itself, only the specific manufacturing process that produced it—allowing Indian pharmaceutical companies to reverse-engineer generic versions of drugs that had product patent protection in the West. The WTO regime now rules out such reverse engineering for the twenty-year duration of

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<sup>7</sup> As cited by the Indian Brand Equity Federation, available at [www.ibef.org](http://www.ibef.org). These figures include contract work that is generated domestically as well as by foreign sponsors—not just clinical-trial activity, but also the manufacturing of active pharmaceutical ingredients.

the patent. This has forced a number of leading Indian drug companies into an R&D-driven business model, whereby they, like their Western counterparts, engage in the much riskier process of new drug discovery and development. Clinical trials become a constitutive part of this business model, because new drugs cannot be developed without subjecting them to an elaborate regime of safety and efficacy testing. In other words, the Indian pharmaceutical industry has itself served as a spur to the CRO sector. WTO entry may also have made India a more attractive research destination from the perspective of Western trial sponsors seeking to outsource, since their intellectual property is better protected under such a regime.

A third set of actors consists of the regulatory agents of the state. The immediately responsible body in India is the Drug Controller-General of India, roughly equivalent to the US Food and Drug Administration. This body, a fairly peripheral presence on the Indian regulatory landscape until a few years ago, is now in the process of recreating itself as a serious agenda-setting organization. The Ministry of Science and Technology is also actively involved through its Department of Biotechnology, which sees clinical research as part of a wider initiative to make India a global biotechnology power. It has pumped money into biotechnology and clinical-research initiatives, especially to open institutes that can perform or facilitate such research around the country. The Department is currently funding several new clinical research training centres around India, and has invested the equivalent of \$1 million in this field.<sup>8</sup> Building the human-resource capability to conduct and monitor trials in India is a key challenge, and a number of entrepreneurial ventures are fully engaged in training the labour force required. Finally, there are the physicians who actually conduct the trials, though in the Indian context they have a relatively marginal presence compared to the CROs in setting the infrastructural and regulatory agenda for research.

There is a strong common interest among these actors—though this applies somewhat less to physicians—not just in building up a research

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<sup>8</sup> According to a speech given by M. K. Bhan, director of the Department of Biotechnology, inaugurating the BioAsia 2006 conference in Hyderabad, 9 February 2006. The day before, the Department's budget had been increased by 25 per cent, indicating both the serious prioritization of biotech by the Indian government and that lack of resources is no longer the issue when it comes to certain types of science and technology in India.

infrastructure in India, but also in promoting the country as a global destination for clinical trials. The experimental potential of Indian populations as trial subjects melds seamlessly with the market potential that Indian CROs perceive from an influx of these trials, and this convergence is facilitated by a larger historical moment that sees the Indian state branding and marketing itself to investors at global forums.

### *Economics and ethics*

Some of the enthusiasm around clinical trials within India is mirrored in the West by agents who might outsource clinical trials to the country. For the most part, however, the anticipated surge in trial contracts to India remains speculative. The infrastructure-building occurring in India is very real; but it is a bet on future outcomes that, like any other speculation, may or may not pay off. To understand the clinical-trial situation in India, we must consider both the enthusiasms and the reservations of Western agents.

The anticipation of global clinical trials coming to India is based on the expectation that it would serve the interests of Western trial sponsors—especially US biotech and pharmaceutical companies—to outsource these trials to the subcontinent. This is at one level a general market expectation; a 2002 McKinsey report, for instance, estimated that clinical research in India will be a \$1 billion industry by 2010.<sup>9</sup> Estimates of this kind have their own repercussions, triggering certain actions on the part of agents both in India and in the West.

The various perceived advantages in taking clinical trials to India include, among others, that of cost; estimates suggest that overall clinical-trial expenses for a multinational company could be reduced by 30 to 50 per cent, thanks to lower labour and infrastructure costs. There is also a perceived recruitment advantage—the assumption being that it is easier to obtain Indians for such trials, especially ‘treatment-naïve’ subjects. A major problem for drug companies conducting trials in the US is that Americans are therapeutically saturated, already taking so many drugs that it is hard to determine the efficacy of the molecule being tested without having to confront a whole range of interactions that muddy the data considerably.

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<sup>9</sup> NASSCOM—McKinsey *Report*, 2002; available at [www.nasscom.in](http://www.nasscom.in).

Other factors come into play when assessing the attractiveness of a country as a clinical-trial location. The recent report by A. T. Kearney, which provided an 'attractiveness index' for countries as trial destinations, considered—in addition to cost efficiency and patient pool—'regulatory conditions', 'relevant expertise' and 'infrastructure and environment'. Indian actors are focusing on these three key areas as part of their capacity-building efforts; and indeed, Kearney already ranks India as the second most attractive destination, after China, for clinical trials outside the US. India scored much higher than the US in terms of patient pool and cost efficiency, but lower on the other three counts.<sup>10</sup>

However, the scenario is more complicated than one in which Western multinationals are tearing down the door to exploit cheap Indian populations. For early-stage trials in particular, it is uncertain how strong the pressure is for Western companies to outsource to India. There are obvious advantages in terms of cost and the ease of volunteer recruitment; but there is also a downside in terms of the relative difficulty of monitoring trials—very important if the data generated is to pass muster with the FDA—and the potential public-relations disaster that could attend an early-stage trial that went disastrously wrong in a Third World context. Indeed, the Kearney report points out that in August 2005, the top twelve pharmaceutical companies were running 175 ongoing trials in Germany—attractiveness index 4.69—and 161 in the UK—attractiveness index 5.0—compared to 26 in India, which had an attractiveness index of 5.58. In 2004, Pfizer invested roughly \$13 million in clinical trials in India, but this is put in perspective by the fact that its total global R&D expenditure was \$8 billion. Perhaps more than pharmaceutical companies themselves, it is Western CROs who see real value in finding new destinations for some of their already outsourced activity. Therefore, while there are convincing market rationales for taking trials to India, and an already strong flow of trials there through the multinational CRO industry, much of the capacity building in clinical research in India is still a bet on potential value from trials that could be outsourced in future.

Capacity building in this context means something far more extensive than the experimental infrastructure for conducting clinical trials, which is perhaps the easiest component in a country like India where material

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<sup>10</sup> A. T. Kearney Report, 'Make Your Move'.

and financial resources are no longer so limited. This most basic aspect of capacity building also generates the least concern among Indian actors trying to attract trials into the country. A more elaborate challenge is building an adequate regulatory infrastructure, which needs to be far stronger if India is to host global trials.<sup>11</sup> This is especially so for trials outsourced from a US-based sponsor, which needs to meet the FDA's stringent criteria. Adriana Petryna has argued for a state of 'ethical variability', suggesting that ethical practices for clinical trials vary between First and Third World locales.<sup>12</sup> While in practice it is quite possible that the implementation of ethical guidelines is ultimately stricter in the First World, it is important to note the very serious attention now given to ethics by both the Indian regulatory agencies and the CRO industry there. Of equal importance is what such ethics comprise, and what is left out.

An ethical-trial protocol is primarily concerned with the question of informed consent. This includes the entire apparatus surrounding the consent process, especially an institutional review board infrastructure. Ethical practices in India are enshrined in guidelines that the government published in 2001. In 2005, these guidelines were converted into laws, known as Schedule Y. Interestingly, India is the only country in the world where the violation of good clinical practice is a criminal rather than a civil offence. At the same time, global trials that are valid in the eyes of the FDA need to be harmonized with what are known as International Conference on Harmonization protocols. Indian regulators are thus currently involved in a massive standardization process, driven by the Indian CRO industry. As legally embodied, then, Indian ethical guidelines are likely to be at least as stringent as those for the conduct of clinical research in the US, and in some ways more so.

Members of India's CRO industry bristle at the suggestion that clinical trials will move to India because it is possible to cut ethical corners there. This idea has been part of the debate around Indian clinical trials, and acquired salience and legitimacy because of the article by Nundy and Gulhati cited above. CRO leaders are acutely aware of the need to build a positive media image for their industry, and place great emphasis on the ways in which Schedule Y exceeds the demands of the International Conference on Harmonization. Specifically, Schedule Y is concerned

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<sup>11</sup> Also essential to capacity building is the establishment of human-resource infrastructure, likewise the infrastructure for managing data generated by the trials.

<sup>12</sup> Petryna, 'Ethical Variability', 'Drug Development'.



with ensuring extra care in gathering informed consent from illiterate subjects and in considering what might constitute 'ethical' compensation for poor subjects recruited into early-stage trials—the logic here being that lucrative remuneration can actually act as a coercive incentive. One Mumbai-based CRO executive, Arun Bhatt, was typically emphatic about the importance of Schedule Y and good clinical practice: 'We are new. We don't want to play with the evolution of ethics.'<sup>13</sup>

Outside the enforcement potential of Schedule Y, however, a larger regulatory body with the scope of the FDA is still absent. As mentioned earlier, the Drug Controller-General of India is the nominal equivalent, but its remit is still basically limited to approving drugs for the market or for import into the country. Part of the regulatory effort currently under way in India consists in building a more substantial regulatory body with oversight powers that parallel those of the FDA, and whose conduct can be harmonized with that of its US counterpart. This was a central recommendation of the Mashelkar Committee Report of October 2005, which proposed a National Biotechnology Regulatory Authority that would regulate not just pharmaceuticals, but also agricultural products, transgenic crops, food and feed, and transgenic animals and aquaculture.<sup>14</sup>

Ethics, legally enshrined and contractually enforced, are integral to the capacity-building effort around clinical research in India. Members of the CRO industry are the most active drivers in building an ethical regulatory infrastructure. Nonetheless, the form this ethic takes—quite literally, the 'informed consent' form that the volunteers sign—does not mitigate the fundamental structural violence of clinical trials conducted in the Third World. I will elaborate on this below, developing a critique of the movement of clinical trials to India in the context of the global logics of biocapital and surplus health. The clinical-research landscape in India cannot be reduced to the neo-colonial exploitation of the local population as 'guinea pigs' by rapacious multinational interests, where

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<sup>13</sup> Interview with the author, 24 February 2006.

<sup>14</sup> Ramesh Mashelkar, the head of the committee that wrote this report, was from 1995 until his retirement in 2006 Director-General of India's Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR). He has been one of India's most influential science policy-makers since independence, responsible in large measure for the aggressive embrace of global market values by the country's scientific establishment. For a longer account of Mashelkar and CSIR, see my *Biocapital: The Constitution of Postgenomic Life*, Durham, NC 2006, especially Chapter 5. The Mashelkar Report can be viewed at [www.biospectrumindia.com](http://www.biospectrumindia.com).

cutting corners is the norm and ethics easily sacrificed. A more nuanced analysis would take account of the desire on the part of the Indian state and corporate actors for the country to become a global experimental site, while noting that a comprehensive attention to ethics is quite compatible with the structural violence of global biocapital.

## 2. 'GOOD CLINICAL PRACTICE': A CASE STUDY

The concern displayed by Indian actors, especially the CRO industry, with what is referred to as good clinical practice is primarily focused on the proper protocols for obtaining informed consent at the time of trial enrolment, and with adequate monitoring of the clinical trials. In order to advance towards a critique of biocapital and surplus health, it is necessary to demonstrate the limitations of ethical practice in the Indian context and, by extension, elsewhere in the Third World.

Consider, for instance, the case of Vimta Laboratories, based in Hyderabad. Vimta can claim in many ways to be the gold-standard Indian CRO. Founded in 1991, it is one of India's oldest; it is the only CRO that is publicly traded on the Bombay Stock Exchange, and the only one in the country that has been audited twice by the FDA—passing both times with flying colours. The clinical-research manager of a US company whom I talked to suggested that Vimta was exactly the sort of Indian CRO with which she would consider collaborating.

Vimta's concern with informed consent, and its processes for securing it, exemplify the insistence on good clinical practice in India. On a visit to Vimta as part of my fieldwork, the first room I was shown was the waiting and screening room. This looks like the waiting room of a railway station; subjects come in and are given their consent forms, along with a basic questionnaire to determine whether they are qualified to participate, in this case in a Phase 1 trial. The walls of the waiting room are empty, except for a single bulletin board. This outlines all the risks that could accrue to participants in a clinical trial, but it is written only in English. I was told that in order to participate, subjects have to be literate—though not necessarily in English—and male; Vimta only enrolls females if the trial sponsor specifies a need for female subjects.

Beyond the waiting room is a long corridor, off which are a number of rooms where different types of medical examination are conducted on trial volunteers. First, their height and weight are recorded. If the subject weighs less than 55 kilos he is not accepted, as the risk of complications is too high. There is then a general physical exam, after which the tests become progressively more invasive; an ECG is conducted in a third room, blood drawn in a fourth—and sent to the pathology lab for analysis—and an X-ray taken in a fifth. I learned while being walked through this corridor that the consent forms the subjects sign in the waiting room are only for the medical screening procedures—if they are selected to participate in the trial, they sign a separate form, specific to the trial in which they are enrolled.

A number of the trials conducted at Vimta are Phase I trials on healthy volunteers. Recruiting subjects for these trials, as I mentioned earlier, has become increasingly difficult in the United States. I was told that volunteer retention is much better in India than in the US, because ‘people trust doctors here’. Interestingly, while it is in principle a challenge to recruit healthy people to have risky molecules administered to them, the entire set-up here seems to emphasize ‘selection’—almost as if being accepted for a trial were a test that only those who are fit enough can pass. Moreover, the subjects are only ever referred to as ‘volunteers’, suggesting no doubt their autonomous rational agency, the same agency that is contractually codified through the consent form.

### *No access to drugs*

Such deep and, I believe, sincere concern with informed consent and good clinical practice, reflected both in national laws and in the practices of companies such as Vimta, does not, however, even touch on the major question of access to drugs. In the US, clinical trials at least implicitly suggest a social contract in which a small number of people are put on potentially risky medication for the sake of a larger social good—the development of new therapies. Those recruited into Phase I trials tend to be less well-off in the US as well, so that the social contract can never be a pure liberal one between rational individuals in what John Rawls would call an ‘original position’ of assumed equality.<sup>15</sup> Nonetheless, there is an animating liberal sentiment which absolutely presumes that

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<sup>15</sup> John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* [1971], Cambridge MA 1999.

the therapy, if developed, will eventually be accessible. And even if this is access via the market, for a price, thus raising issues of affordability and distributive justice, these issues can in principle be addressed through liberal welfare-state mechanisms. In the Indian context, by contrast, there is no guarantee that an experimental drug tested on a local population will necessarily be marketed there after approval—let alone be made available at an affordable cost. The Indian state has made no moves to ensure this, for example through such mechanisms as compulsory licensing regulations. The likely outcome is therefore a situation where Indian populations are used purely as experimental subjects, without the implicit social contract of eventual therapeutic access.<sup>16</sup>

The question of access to drugs is certainly a live one in the Indian medical community, leading to critiques such as that of Nundy and Gulhati. A leading Delhi-based psychiatrist in a prominent private hospital—who preferred to remain anonymous—told me that ‘while we understand the need for conducting trials, there is need for more uniform regulatory control’.<sup>17</sup> This is not someone outside the circuit of clinical research; he is himself engaged in testing a number of psychiatric drugs. Most of the trials such prominent physicians conduct, however, are categorized as Phase 3, and involve patients they are treating, which puts their practice under a different ethical calculus—having to do with pastoral care—from that of CROs looking to increase Phase 1 trials on healthy volunteers, where the issue is simply one of experimental subjectivity. The relationship of such trials to drug access is an acute question for this physician, especially as regards subjects who may need to continue taking the experimental medication that is tested upon them if it is shown to have positive effects. The only mechanisms that exist to provide such access, however, arise from the policies of the companies sponsoring the trials, or the concerns of the centre conducting the trial. The same physician told me: ‘In the last two trials, the companies said they’ll try and make the drugs available. We have yet to see if that will happen. If it doesn’t happen, then we will only participate with companies that give an absolute commitment.’

While this physician and the hospitals where he works might be willing to take such an uncompromising stand on linking clinical

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<sup>16</sup> In contrast, Kristin Peterson has found in her research in Nigeria that the dominant issue is access to drugs. Meanwhile, the ethical/regulatory infrastructure is far from robust.

<sup>17</sup> Interview with the author, 27 February 2006.

experimentation with therapeutic access and pastoral care, such a linkage is less likely to figure in the calculations of the CROs, especially those focused on early-stage trials, since their source of value lies directly in increasing the number of trials they can conduct, rather than in providing tangible therapeutic benefits to patients. As suggested earlier, it is the CRO industry rather than physicians that is currently driving the establishment of regulatory infrastructure in India. The Delhi-based psychiatrist told me that while there is intense debate within the psychiatric community in India over the relationship of clinical trials to drug access, physician investigators are involved only to a very limited extent in efforts to streamline the regulatory process.

This subjection of patients to experimental regimes without an insistence on concomitant therapeutic access does not seem to arise primarily from any reluctance of Western pharmaceutical companies to market drugs in India. It is true that 85 per cent of all global drug sales are currently accounted for by US, European and Japanese markets, though the burgeoning middle class in India may be a factor in the companies' future planning. At the present time, however, the only real avenue for any sort of therapeutic access to experimental drugs is through the 'compassionate use' programmes of a number of pharmaceutical companies, which make the drugs tested in Phase 3 trials available to the sick volunteers for a fixed period of time after completion of the trial. No one in the Indian CRO industry whom I talked to, and no one who is actively involved in developing clinical-practice guidelines, felt it was necessary to insist that drugs tested in India should be marketed there, in contrast to the vigorous discussion among physicians of the relationship between clinical trials and access to drugs. 'Ethics', therefore, are provisional and partial, bearing primarily at this point on concerns about informed consent.

The uncoupling of experimental subjectivity from therapeutic access, which—through acts of omission—occurs at a legal and regulatory level, enrolls Indian experimental subjects in the cause of health, but locates them outside a regime of pastoral care. In other words, these experimental subjects contribute in some nebulous sense to health by making themselves available as experimental subjects, but this is in no way necessarily linked to their own healthiness, or that of other Indians who might obtain access to new medication as a consequence of the risks to which the volunteers are exposed. The nature of these risks was brought home to me during my tour of Virmta, when I was shown a room, at the

time dark and secluded, with just four beds in it. This, I was told, is the intensive care unit where trial subjects are admitted and ministered to in case of adverse effects. It looked like a medical emergency room of the kind used to attend to accidents on the factory floor. It re-emphasized not just the high-risk nature of experimental subjectivity, but that being a trial subject is, specifically, high-risk *labour*.

### 3. EXPROPRIATION, EXPLOITATION, VIOLENCE

A theoretical critique of the global biomedical economy, situating the latter in relation to the logics of expropriation and exploitation, requires the introduction of the key concepts of *biocapital* and *surplus health*. By biocapital, I refer to the simultaneous systemic and emergent production of the life sciences, especially biomedicine, alongside the frameworks of capital and the market within which such technoscience increasingly operates. There are three layers of specificity to biocapital: institutional, epistemic and structural/epochal.

First, the biomedical industry, like any other, has its specific institutional terrain. In the US, this terrain is seen as partitioned into 'upstream' and 'downstream'. Downstream lie big multinational pharmaceutical companies, with the human and capital resources to bring drugs to market. These are supplemented by a few biotech companies that have managed to grow sufficiently to join the marketing effort. Upstream companies conduct more basic research, focusing on informatics, the development of diagnostic kits or the provision of research tools to other companies. Clinical-research organizations fit into this model as downstream facilitators to large pharmaceutical companies. There are particular risks in this marketplace, in view of the enormous time spent on drug development (roughly fifteen years), the cost (\$800 million per drug, according to the industry, though that is most certainly inflated) and the risk (only one in five drugs makes it through clinical trials). And there are particular power hierarchies within it, such as the hugely powerful position of big pharmaceutical companies in the value chain relative to smaller biotech companies.

The second layer of specificity is epistemic. For instance, emergent life sciences such as genomics have the potential to radically reconfigure our understanding of life in ways that parallel the fashion in which

neo-liberal logics of capital are reconfiguring our understanding of value.<sup>18</sup> While I do not elaborate on this point here, I believe that to describe the institutional arrangements of the life sciences is not a sufficient basis for comprehending biocapital in all its complexity; emergent epistemologies are also crucial.

These first two layers of specificity are internal to biocapital. The third has to do with the larger epochal transformations in capitalism as a whole, which preface some of biocapital's structural logics. The transformation that is pertinent to understanding biocapital is what Joseph Dumit identifies as the change in the logic of the biomedical industry, shifting away from being 'an arm of capital' to becoming 'an industry in itself'.<sup>19</sup> At an earlier stage of capitalist development, medicine was integral to reproducing the conditions under which industrial production was made possible. Capital needed healthy workers. But just as the logic of commodity production became self-perpetuating and self-sustaining, to the point where commercial activity became an end in itself, so too has the logic of the production of health for work become self-perpetuating and self-sustaining, turning into an industry that produces health not for work's sake, but for health's sake. In biocapital, health operates directly as an index of value, unmediated through the labour-power of the worker. In Foucauldian terms, it is not labour but life itself which becomes the locus of value in biocapital, with health becoming the index of life, rather than the facilitator of labour.

Crucial to this transformation is the emergence of the value-form of surplus health. Dumit defines surplus health as 'the *capacity* to add medications to our life through lowering the level of risk required to be "at risk"'.<sup>20</sup> This occurs by setting biomedical risk thresholds. Clinical trials become a part of the apparatus through which such a lowering of the risk level takes place. An analogy might be made with the way in which machinery, in Marx's analysis in Volume One of *Capital*, operates not to reduce work, but to increase surplus labour by widening the gap between waged work and the potential productivity of the worker.

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<sup>18</sup> For a more extensive elaboration of this logic, see Melinda Cooper, *Surplus Life: Biotechnics and the Transformation of Capital*, Seattle forthcoming.

<sup>19</sup> Joseph Dumit, 'Drugs, Algorithms, Markets and Surplus Health', *Lively Capital* workshop paper presented at University of California, Irvine, 2006.

<sup>20</sup> Dumit, 'Drugs, Algorithms, Markets and Surplus Health'.

Surplus health refers to the market value that pharmaceutical companies gain from the potential for future illness of those who might one day consume their drugs—which includes anyone with the buying power to constitute a market for therapeutics. As with surplus-value in the Marxian sense, surplus health is an animating abstraction, in this case of the logic of pharmaceutical risk. Just as the setting of wage rates is the material calculus for the unfolding of surplus-value, so the setting of biomedical risk thresholds is the material calculus upon which surplus health unfolds. And as machinery serves to increase surplus-value by increasing the potential for labour over and above that remunerated by wages—through an increase in the *efficiency* of labour—so too can clinical trials serve to increase surplus health by demonstrating therapeutic efficacy.

Similarly, just as machinery requires labour to operate it—which, during the era of industrial capital, was high-risk work—so clinical trials require experimental subjects as their high-risk labour. Dumit suggests that biomedical markets in advanced liberal societies—especially the United States—depend on the generation of surplus health, which in turn operates through the setting of risk thresholds. The knowledge of disease risk provided by diagnostic-testing capabilities, and calibrated through these thresholds, enables the marketing of drugs for diseases that are increasingly reframed as ‘chronic’. Just as much of the manufacturing labour previously performed by the working class in the First World was later exported to Third World peripheries, so much of the Phase 1 experimentation, initially performed on marginal populations in the US, is now being exported to Third World sites such as India. The experimental subjects there, outside the circuits of pastoral care and therapeutic consumption, come to be *merely risked*. But these very circuits rely for their constitution on the existence of such ‘merely risked’ subjects. These experimental subjects provide the conditions of possibility for the neo-liberal consumer subjects for whom surplus health is generated.

### *The context of consent*

The ‘merely risked’ volunteer is subjected to a logic of expropriation integral to the structural logic of biocapital that I am trying to trace. Bodies are made available to the global machinery of experimentation, machinery driven by the value logic of pharmaceutical capital. Indeed,



the global scale of these circuits is precisely a function of capital's value considerations. Without the cost rationales for outsourcing clinical trials to the Third World,<sup>1</sup> their globalization would not have become such a dynamic imperative—such trials had, after all, been an important part of the American drug development landscape for nearly half a century before moves to take them abroad began in the mid 1990s. And without the property mechanisms, harmonized and enforced globally through the WTO, that provide patent protection to multinational pharmaceutical interests, globalizing capital would not have had the security to realize its aspirations. Similarly, capital considerations drive the Indian CRO industry to a vigorous build-up of infrastructure to attract clinical trials, increase trial recruitment, and uncouple these considerations from any serious concern with therapeutic access.

In this situation, the partial ethic enshrined in 'good clinical practice', far from mitigating the structural violence of capital, serves instead to facilitate it. The instrument through which this takes place is the liberal contract embodied in the informed consent form. Just as the wage is the materialized contractual form through which individuals are 'freed' from serfdom and converted into workers for industrial capital, so the informed consent document 'frees' experimental subjects from being coerced guinea-pigs<sup>2</sup> by providing them with the autonomous agency such a contract signifies. The concerns raised over ethical variability in global clinical trials are often premised on the notion that ethical enforcement is likely to be looser in the Third World than in the First. My attempt here has been to show that, on the contrary, it is precisely the global harmonization of ethical standards that provides the conditions of possibility for the experimental subjection of the 'merely risked' Third World subject,<sup>3</sup> and further, that this harmonization of ethics goes hand-in-hand with the global harmonization of property regimes. These two parallel movements—the contractual codification of ethics and the exclusionary instruments of property—together provide global capital with the security to turn healthy Indian populations into experimental subjects, who are both merely risked and free to choose to be so.

The structural violence of clinical experimentation starts with the fact that it is a procedure that can only be set in motion by the risking of healthy subjects. Indeed, the very epistemology of clinical trials is risk-laden—both for the subjects experimented upon, and for the companies who invest huge amounts of money in a therapeutic molecule

that may or may not eventually come to market. The structural violence of experimentation is then exacerbated by pre-existing global inequalities, which result in more bodies available for less cost in Third World locales. If the former violence is epistemic, the latter is historical. A third layer of structural violence is imposed in the form of the liberal contract, which frees the experimental subject to make his body available not just for experimentation, but for exploitation, since the clinical trial becomes a locus of surplus-health generation.

The question raised by this third layer of structural violence is one that was central for Marx in his analysis of capital, and pertains to the conditions of possibility that ensure the availability of workers for capital—or in this case, of experimental subjects for clinical trials—in the first place. In ‘The So-Called Primitive Accumulation’, Marx shows that this availability is generated by pre-existing acts of violence that created a property-less proletariat.<sup>21</sup> Such processes are historically specific, but they do show a consistency of form. Thus, for instance, subject recruitment into Phase I clinical trials in India occurs, on the face of it, through newspaper advertisements. The public face of trial recruitment does not, however, reveal the conditions that make it financially attractive for individuals to risk themselves as experimental subjects.

I have written elsewhere, for example, about Wellquest, which is located in the mill districts of Mumbai.<sup>22</sup> I learned from scientists there that most of the trial subjects recruited by this CRO happened to be unemployed mill workers who had lost their jobs due to the progressive evisceration of the Mumbai textile industry over the last thirty years. The number of unemployed is over two hundred thousand, many of whom are still waiting for the payment of back wages. They are already, therefore, subjected to the violence of de-proletarianization that occurred following the demise of a sector of manufacturing capital. This violence is exacerbated by the fact that the textile mills are situated on prime land for property development, with former mill owners themselves turning to real-estate speculation as a far more lucrative source of capital investment. This means that the workers’ tenements or *chawls*, mainly

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<sup>21</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume One*, translated by Ben Fowkes, Harmondsworth 1976.

<sup>22</sup> Sunder Rajan, ‘Subjects of Speculation: Emergent Life Sciences and Market Logics in the US and India’, *American Anthropologist*, vol. 107, no. 1 (2005), pp. 19–30. See also *Biocapital*, Chapter 2.

located close to the mills, are under threat of demolition, so that in addition to losing wage and livelihood, these workers are now in danger of losing their shelter as well. Demolition of the *chawls* was temporarily halted by a 2005 Bombay High Court verdict that stayed real-estate development in the mill districts, but this was overturned by the Indian Supreme Court in March 2006, making it legal to tear down the mills and *chawls* and build middle-class housing instead.

The violence of de-proletarianization and dispossession is a function of the dominance of speculative real estate, which has replaced textile manufacturing as a source of value-generation for capital. A number of unemployed mill workers have turned into street hawkers in order to earn a living, but there is an organized state and middle-class campaign against the hawkers, who are deemed noisy and polluting, and perhaps most importantly, accused of taking up valuable parking space.<sup>23</sup> There is no way to understand the dynamics of clinical experimentation in the mill districts of Mumbai without taking into account all these prior moments of violence that provide the inducement to sign an informed consent form. First the mill workers are removed from their factories. Then they are removed from their dwellings. Then they are removed from the streets. Only thus do they acquire the freedom to become autonomous trial 'volunteers'.

### *Global connections*

One way of understanding the situation of expropriation that I have described is in terms of neo-colonialism. This is the trope employed by Nundy and Gulhati in their critique of clinical trials in India. It is also consonant with positions taken in various fictional portrayals of 'bio-colonialism', such as Manjula Padmanabhan's dystopian play *Harvest*, or Patricia Grace's *Baby No-Eyes*.<sup>24</sup> All these accounts portray a deep historical and continuing inequality, whereby rich/First World/white subjects enrich their health—and often wealth—through the corporeal dispossession of subaltern/Third World/racially marked subjects. While sympathetic to the inequalities that such accounts describe, the

<sup>23</sup> For an account of the violence against hawkers in Mumbai, see Arvind Rajagopal, 'The Menace of Hawkers', in Katherine Verdery and Caroline Humphrey, eds, *Property in Question: Value Transformation in the Global Economy*, Oxford 2004.

<sup>24</sup> Manjula Padmanabhan, *Harvest*, London 2003, Patricia Grace, *Baby No-Eyes*, Honolulu 1998.

accumulation by dispossession, to use David Harvey's term,<sup>25</sup> that I am trying to trace here is not agential but structural, where the one thing that accumulates as a consequence of 'merely risking' experimental subjects is not health—not even that of the advanced liberal subject—but value.

For this, it is important to turn to Dumit's account of surplus health in the United States. The therapeutic economy that Dumit traces in the US context is also not one of pastoral care, but rather therapeutic saturation. Dumit and I have indeed suggested that, considered from the perspective of pharmaceutical company logic, health in the US is not about healthiness either, but about expanding the market for therapeutics.<sup>26</sup> Rising therapeutic consumption can be achieved either by increasing the number of people who take a particular drug—most effectively achieved by 'off-label use', i.e. prescribing drugs for treatments other than those for which the drug was initially approved—or by increasing the time-span of the prescription, justified by reframing diseases as chronic states rather than events. Dumit observes that currently 'the average American is prescribed and purchases somewhere between nine and thirteen different prescription-only drugs per year.' He continues:

According to the pharmacy benefits companies and insurance companies, such as Express Scripts, sampling 3 million unique individuals in their plans, 11 per cent of Americans were prescribed cholesterol-lowering drugs last year, 40 per cent of all those over 50. More than 20 per cent of women over 40 were prescribed anti-depressants in 2002, almost 10 per cent of boys 10–14 were prescribed attention-deficit disorder drugs . . . The growth rates for almost all classes of drugs have been in the low double digits for a decade, with prescription rates for children growing upwards of 30 per cent per year. Similarly, both the prevalence (the number of people on each drug) and the intensity (the size of the yearly prescription) are projected to continue to grow in all drug categories for the foreseeable future. The figures do match the fears, and according to many surveys, Americans are spending more time, more energy, more attention, and money on health. Health clearly is not simply a cost to the nation to be reduced; it is also a market to be grown.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> David Harvey, *The New Imperialism*, Oxford 2003.

<sup>26</sup> Joseph Dumit and Kaushik Sunder Rajan, 'Biocapital, Surplus Health and the End(s) of Biopolitics', manuscript in preparation.

<sup>27</sup> Joseph Dumit, 'Living in the Aggregate: Accumulating Prognoses, Growing Markets, Experimental Subjects'. Paper presented at American Anthropology Association meeting, San José, 2006.

Marx's analysis in Volume One of *Capital* is two-fold. First, the contemporary conditions of industrial capital that he traces are marked by exploitation materialized through surplus-value, a function of labour-power being always already greater than the labour remunerated by wage. Analogously to this, surplus health is a function of potential therapeutic consumption that is always already greater than that required to maintain healthiness. This excess therapeutic consumption is not harmless—indeed, it involves ever-greater medication of the American population, and has produced catastrophic and fatal side-effects such as those associated with the cox-2 inhibitor Vioxx. This therapeutic saturation also leads directly to biomedical rationalizations for the outsourcing of clinical trials, as it becomes increasingly difficult to test the effects of experimental drugs in populations who tend to be on many other drugs that interact with the molecules being tested.

But the conditions of possibility for exploitation through surplus-value generation are, as Marx shows, dependent on a prior expropriation, achieved through a form of violent accumulation that forces people into becoming workers for industrial capital in the first place. The two-fold movement of capital—violent dispossession followed by exploitation—is a temporal one in Marx's analysis. In the case of clinical trials, however, the violence is spatial, with Third World experimental subjects expropriated not so that First World consumer subjects become healthy, but so that they can be exploited. In both cases, the only value that is constantly preserved and increased is value itself.

Much of my argument rests on the fact that clinical experimentation in the Indian context is not linked to therapeutic access. It is, however, certainly possible to imagine such a situation; and if this linkage is not created either by the intervention of advocacy groups fighting for access to drugs, or by the state's insistence on a biopolitical rationale of public good and public health, it is most likely to be brought about by market mechanisms once India is perceived as a potential market for therapeutic consumption. In such a scenario, one can quite easily envisage the continued expropriation of experimental subjects—those who fall out of the market because they lack the purchasing power to buy drugs—side by side with exploitation of therapeutic consumers within India itself. Stefan Ecks has been studying psychiatric drug marketing by companies

like Pfizer in India, and observed strategies not dissimilar to those employed in the US.<sup>28</sup>

If we are to understand biocapital from the perspective of the pharmaceutical companies' logic, then what is at stake is not therapeutic access in the cause of health, but increasing therapeutic consumption in the cause of value. In parallel, from the perspective of CROs, the issue is not clinical trials in the cause of therapeutic access, but rather clinical trials in the cause of value. The global articulation of pharmaceutical and CRO logics of value-generation both structures and overdetermines an allegedly benign enterprise in terms of expropriation and exploitation. Other competing logics of capital also naturally come into play, most notably a logic of insurance that is particularly salient in the American context of managed care. It is also relevant to the European public-health context, where paying for increased therapeutic consumption is a burden, and the logic of value dictates an accent on disease prevention that is not mediated by therapeutic saturation.

It is important in every case to privilege the analysis of value, rather than assuming from the outset that the issue is one of biopolitics or pastoral care. At the same time there are many incongruities that are vital to note, not least the Indian state's hyper-attentiveness to ethics and its regulation of clinical practice. The structural violence of global clinical trials on the subcontinent is not due to a lack of ethics, but to the fact that value, captured by the logic of capital and mediated through the pharmaceutical and CRO industries, overdetermines the practices that emerge.

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<sup>28</sup> Except that direct-to-consumer advertising, an important strategy in the US, is not allowed in India. Instead, such marketing is aimed exclusively at physicians. Stefan Ecks, 'Global Citizenship Inc. Big Pharma and "Depression Awareness" in Urban India', *Asian Biotechnologies* workshop paper presented at Honolulu, 2006.

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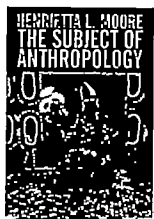
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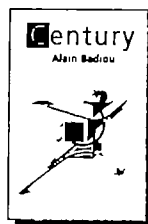
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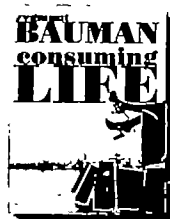
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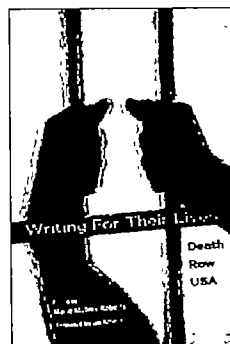
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## BUILDING ON KYOTO

**G**EORGE MONBIOT HAS attained an iconic status among English-speaking progressives. His ability to see through the sophistry of governments, corporations and their various apologists has provided us with a range of new political insights. In recent years he has devoted many of his columns in the *Guardian* to the defining problem of our era, climate change, exposing the cant of politicians and dirty dealing of the fossil fuel lobby, deploying both forensic research skills and elegant prose. Monbiot's book on climate change was therefore keenly anticipated by his readers. Like all of those who truly face up to the implications of climate change science, Monbiot is exasperated at the timidity of those in government who claim to take global warming seriously. Even environmentalists, he suggests, refuse to confront the enormity of the task.

*Heat* is Monbiot's search to find the answer to climate change.<sup>1</sup> Over several chapters he considers the problem areas—energy wastage, electricity generation, land transport, aviation—and argues that Britain can cut its greenhouse gas emissions by 90 per cent. The argument is presented as a kind of personal intellectual odyssey, describing where he went, what he read, how his thinking evolved, which ingrained assumptions he had to discard and the emotional turmoil of getting to the end. The book might be read as a detective story in which the author and protagonist must solve this crucial puzzle. By the end of it, Monbiot believes he has found a 'workable solution' for slashing Britain's emissions, and that it is 'generally applicable' to other countries.

There is a deeper message in *Heat*, one that is anathema to fossil fuel lobbyists—not to mention neoclassical economists and hand-wringing politicians. Despite the comforting arguments of some environmentalists—and Nicholas Stern, in his 2006 report for the UK

Treasury—that we can tackle climate change without major disruption, in truth cutting the world's greenhouse gases by the necessary amounts is almost intractable. We can only avoid catastrophe—including millions dying in the Third World—if we radically change the way we in the rich countries go about our daily lives. Above all, we must abandon our comfortable belief in progress. There could be no greater challenge to growth fetishism and our deepest held assumptions about progress, nor any graver threat to the power of the 'wealth creators'.

Are we in the rich countries of the world capable of making such a psychological transition? The glib answer is that we simply must. Yet such an environmental imperative must conquer a more powerful force. Our profligate consumption is no longer aimed at meeting material needs but at reproducing ourselves psychologically. In modern consumer capitalism, consumption activity is the primary means by which we create an identity and sustain a fragile sense of self. If, in order to solve climate change, we are asked to change the way we consume, then we are being asked to change who we are—to experience a sort of death. So desperately do we cling to our manufactured selves that we fear relinquishing them more than we fear the consequences of climate change. This helps to explain the chasm between the complacency of ordinary people and the rising panic among climate scientists and clear-eyed environmentalists. Monbiot understands this, and some of the most compelling passages of *Heat* explore the psychological obstacles to saving the planet. The campaign to maintain a liveable climate is unique:

it is a campaign not for abundance but for austerity. It is a campaign not for more freedom but for less. Strangest of all, it is a campaign not just against other people, but also against ourselves.<sup>2</sup>

### *Climate change wars*

Having begun by characterizing humankind's relationship with fossil fuels as a Faustian pact, Monbiot then turns to the climate change denial industry. The political campaign to persuade governments to take action to prevent global warming has been conducted mainly by environmental organizations, based on the work of scientists around the world. But by the time global warming was beginning to be recognized as the gravest threat

<sup>1</sup> George Monbiot, *Heat: How to stop the planet burning*, Allen Lane: London 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Monbiot, *Heat*, p. 215.

to humanity, environmentalism had given rise to its opposite, a virulently hostile coalition of industrialists, right-wing commentators and conservative politicians. From the outset the evidence for global warming and the climate crisis has been resisted by the tide of anti-environmentalism, itself powered by the same energies that drove anti-communism before the fall of the Berlin Wall. Most recently the argument has been put by Margaret Thatcher's favourite chancellor, Nigel Lawson. Attacking Nicholas Stern, Lawson claimed that environmentalism 'is profoundly hostile to capitalism and the market economy'.<sup>3</sup> This is the nub of the matter. The logic of the sceptics—in the right-wing think tanks, the conservative media and the White House—is as follows: environmentalists are the enemies of capitalism; what they advocate must be contrary to the interests of capitalism; climate scientists who provide the evidence that supports their views are also enemies of capitalism; accepting the evidence of global warming means giving in to anti-capitalists; therefore, we must not accept the science of climate change and will seek out any shred of evidence that appears to contradict it.

This is more than an ideological conviction; for some it borders on a religious one. When asked in 2001 if President Bush would be urging Americans to curb their energy use, his spokesman Ari Fleischer replied: 'That's a big "no"'. He went on to declare that wasting energy is akin to godliness:

The President believes that it's an American way of life, and that it should be the goal of policy-makers to protect [it]. The American way of life is a blessed one . . . The President also believes that the American people's use of energy is a reflection of the strength of our economy, of the way of life that the American people have come to enjoy.<sup>4</sup>

In recent years wealthy Texans have discovered the joys of sitting in front of a log fire. As it is usually hot in Texas they must turn their air conditioners up so they can enjoy the cosy warmth from their hearths. Using energy simultaneously to heat a house and cool it only seems perverse if you reject George Bush's conception of the American way of life.

The global warming deniers have been conducting a sustained war on climate science and the Kyoto Protocol since the mid-1990s. Monbiot

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<sup>3</sup> Nigel Lawson, 'The Economics and Politics of Climate Change', Centre for Policy Studies, 1 November 2006, p. 16.

<sup>4</sup> White House press briefing, 7 May 2001.

reveals that some of the organizations and personnel that pursued a covert strategy of disinformation in defence of the tobacco industry shifted across into promoting climate change denial on behalf of the fossil fuel lobby. They adopted the same tactics of sowing doubt in the public mind, characterizing global warming as an unfounded panic in an increasingly risk-averse world. The pivotal role of ExxonMobil in funding and promoting anti-green organizations and climate deniers was detailed in January of this year in a report by the Union of Concerned Scientists. In September 2006, Britain's Royal Society took the highly unusual step of writing to ExxonMobil, asking that it desist from funding organizations that 'have misrepresented the science of climate change by outright denial of the evidence'. The report mentioned the Competitive Enterprise Institute—a Washington-based conservative think tank 'dedicated to advancing the principles of free enterprise and limited government'—and the London-based International Policy Network. ExxonMobil's response was to sound wounded.

Among the important organizations funded by ExxonMobil has been the website Tech Central Station, which describes itself as a site 'where free markets meet technology'. It is probably the world's most effective climate-sceptic website. Until recently it was published by the DCI Group, a top Republican lobbying and public relations firm with close ties to the Bush Administration. DCI advertises its ability to provide 'third party support' to clients and has been linked to several industry-funded coalitions that pose as grassroots organizations. 'Corporations seldom win alone', the group's website says. 'Whatever the issue, whatever the target—elected officials, regulators or public opinion—you need reliable third party allies to advocate your cause. We can help you recruit credible coalition partners and engage them for maximum impact. It's what we do best.' The company's skills in astroturfing were acquired by its managing partners—Tom Synhorst, Doug Goodyear and Tim Hyde—during nearly a decade of work for R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company in the 1990s.

In addition to front groups and industry-funded websites, a number of right-wing think tanks have played a crucial role in preventing action on global warming. As Monbiot recounts, perhaps the foremost has been the Competitive Enterprise Institute. Along with the many statements it has made denying the seriousness of global warming, the CEI has argued that climate change would create a 'milder, greener, more prosperous

world' and that 'Kyoto was a power grab based on deception and fear'. In addition to ExxonMobil, corporate funders include the American Petroleum Institute, Cigna Corporation, Dow Chemical, EBCO Corp, General Motors and IBM. The CEI is also intimately involved in the Cooler Heads Coalition, which argues that the risks of global warming are speculative. Pre-empting the release of Al Gore's film *An Inconvenient Truth* in 2006, the CEI made television advertisements arguing against climate change. Notoriously, one of the ads ended with the words: 'Carbon dioxide, they call it pollution, we call it life.' These groups have spawned and emboldened a network of individuals who have little scientific training, but who are utterly convinced that the 'global warming theory' is a giant fraud being committed by the scientific establishment.

Aware that fanatical anti-environmentalism does not appeal to the general public, the anti-Kyoto forces have linked their arguments to currents that run deep in consumer capitalism. Societies dominated by growth fetishism provide fertile ground for any claim that a proposed intervention, such as a carbon tax, would undermine the right to keep consuming at ever-higher levels. Monbiot understands the game, and that is why his strategy of getting activists onto the streets is the only one that can work: but he argues that the activists must be re-educated. In one of his strongest chapters, he makes a compelling case that if we are to decarbonize the world economy we shall have to give up air travel. This appears shocking, the sort of claim that is so unacceptable that we immediately look for psychological defences that allow us to reject it.

### *Ambitious targets*

In truth we could give up all but the occasional flight, and after a period of adaptation easily become accustomed to travelling less or travelling differently, just as we did before planes were turned into buses with wings in the 1970s. The principal obstacle, and it is a formidable one, is a well-established psychological fact: while we do not much yearn for what we cannot imagine, we become powerfully attached to it once we have it. In one of the more fearless and far-reaching observations in *Heat*, Monbiot concludes that solving climate change 'demands that we do something few people in the rich world have done for many years: recognize that progress now depends upon the exercise of fewer opportunities'.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Monbiot, *Heat*, p. 188.

Although Monbiot identifies the psychological and political barriers as the principal obstacles to deep cuts in greenhouse gas emissions, the largest part of his book is devoted to finding a technologically feasible solution. Climate change is a subject that has drawn in thousands of experts from across a range of disciplines—most of the physical sciences, energy systems, economics, finance, ethics, politics, international relations and, increasingly, psychology and the sociology of knowledge. It is difficult for anyone to have expertise in more than one or two of these disciplines: one must decide not what to believe, but whom to believe. Yet Monbiot casts humility aside.

Monbiot has decided that his task in *Heat* is to achieve emission reductions that might prevent the globe warming by more than two degrees: a more ambitious target than most. That this target requires stabilizing greenhouse gas emissions at the equivalent of 440ppm of carbon dioxide is suggested to Monbiot in an unpublished paper, sent by a man who—he concedes—‘is not a professional climate scientist but [who] appears to have done his homework’, with supporting evidence from the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact.<sup>6</sup> Proposing an egalitarian division of carbon emissions per person by 2030—rather than a longer convergence period during which the developing world might ‘catch up’—Monbiot then calculates his aggressive target for the rich world: a 90 per cent reduction by the same date, far beyond the cuts proposed by anyone else.

Seemingly determined to be more audacious than any other environmentalist, Monbiot ends up endorsing the global coal industry’s golden bullet, the technology that it prays will allow it to survive and prosper in a carbon-constrained world. Carbon capture and storage—also known as geosequestration—involves building coal-fired power stations with the ability to separate out the carbon dioxide from the flue gases, then concentrating and pumping the carbon dioxide through pipelines to long-term storage in saline aquifers deep beneath the earth. As a solution to global warming this is a political ruse first and foremost—even its supporters concede that it will not make a significant difference to global emissions for 15–20 years, and it is likely to be more expensive than existing alternatives. Monbiot should know better than to give it his blessing; after all, both the Bush Administration and the Howard government in Australia have put most of their policy eggs in that basket.

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<sup>6</sup> Monbiot, *Heat*, pp. 15–6.

The argument of *Heat* is marred by a number of misunderstandings, especially in Monbiot's consideration of the economics of his proposed solution to the climate change problem. After arguing against reducing carbon emissions purely by way of taxes—which would allow the rich to live as they choose, or necessitate unwieldy rebate systems—he proposes a rationing system for international allocations of carbon emissions. Yet his system for allocating carbon budgets within a national economy is a kind of emissions trading system—it would 'create a new currency' that could be 'traded with other people'—that would again allow rich lifestyles to continue, largely unimpeded. He argues that the European Emissions Scheme is flawed because it allows polluters to avoid cutting their carbon emissions, by paying others to cut theirs; but that is the point of any trading system, including his own. He argues that if the required cuts are deep enough 'every sector must cut its emissions by roughly that amount'. This must be wrong, but it serves his purpose of wanting to show how every sector can achieve 90 per cent cuts.<sup>7</sup> Monbiot does not seem to grasp that a carbon tax and an emissions trading system are very similar, except that the first fixes the price of emissions and allows the market to determine the quantity emitted, while the latter sets the quantity of emissions and allows the market to set the price. The system he proposes is largely embodied in the Kyoto Protocol, and the European Emissions Trading Scheme is part of that framework.

Monbiot's criticisms of the Kyoto Protocol could play into the hands of the fossil fuel lobby. The need to accommodate contentious and poorly understood economic and equity effects in a global environmental agreement made the Kyoto negotiations the most complex and ambitious international treaty process ever attempted. It involved 180-odd states with enormously disparate interests and multitudinous allegiances—even before account is taken of the spoiling role of the powerful fossil fuel lobby. Consider the components of the system. The Protocol is built around mandatory emission limits for rich countries, with an unstated expectation that developing countries will adopt limits once the West has shown the way. It incorporates an emissions trading system that allows states finding it difficult to meet mandatory caps to buy surplus emission permits from other countries that can cut their emissions by more than they are required to. This sets up powerful incentives, as well as slashing the cost of the system and allowing deeper cuts. It includes a Clean Development Mechanism

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<sup>7</sup> Monbiot, *Heat*, p. 59.

that enables companies in rich countries to invest in emission reduction projects in poor countries, thus giving the latter a stake in the system and much-needed financial flows. Of course there are some loopholes in the Protocol—Russian ‘hot air’ and the incorporation of ‘forest sinks’ being the biggest—but they were the price of reaching an agreement.<sup>8</sup> Given the almost impossible task, the Kyoto Protocol was a profoundly important achievement. It requires no structural changes other than the closing of these loopholes and agreement on a global compliance mechanism that imposes sanctions on recalcitrant states.

Monbiot’s comments on the failure of the Protocol to incorporate emissions from aviation are also ill judged. So fraught and finely balanced were the negotiations at Kyoto that it was inevitable that some issues would be left off the table to be dealt with in future rounds. Yet Monbiot ridicules the UK Department of Transport for stating that the lack of international agreement means that aviation emissions are not included in the inventory of greenhouse gases. ‘But a child could see that you simply divide the emissions [from international flights] by half’, he writes. I have no brief to defend a sclerotic bureaucracy, but only an imperfect understanding of the problem could lead to such an answer. There are too many ‘what ifs’ to mention, but one will do. What if it is a flight from a poor country that has no target under the Protocol? The Department of Transport acknowledges that the aviation industry should pay for the environmental damage caused by planes. This in itself must send chills through the airline executives, but for Monbiot it is not enough, and he resorts to the cheap shot: ‘Should a steward be sacrificed every time someone in Ethiopia dies of hunger?’<sup>9</sup>

### *Clash of ideologies*

A month after *Heat* appeared, publication of the Stern review caused waves around the world. When Stern was commissioned by UK Chancellor Gordon Brown to consider the economic implications of climate change and measures to reduce emissions, his unofficial remit

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<sup>8</sup> Under the Kyoto Protocol Russia is required to ‘limit’ its emissions to 1990 levels over 2008–12. The collapse of Soviet industry in the early 1990s, however, means that Russia’s emissions are not expected to reach 1990 levels until well after 2012. The difference is known as ‘hot air’. The effectiveness of forests as carbon sinks, meanwhile, is strongly contested.

<sup>9</sup> Monbiot, *Heat*, p. 175.



was to persuade America and Australia, to join global efforts and ratify the Kyoto Protocol. Stern set out to refute the principal argument used by the governments of those countries to justify their reluctance: that cutting emissions would be economically harmful. Stern and his team concluded that the costs of doing nothing—that is, the damage to economic activity of climate change—are likely to exceed the costs of cutting emissions by an order of magnitude. In this way he seemed to turn the argument of the recalcitrants on its head. Even ignoring the environmental costs, it makes financial sense to induce the transition to a low-carbon world. Although they are ostensibly on the same side, there is a sharp divergence between the arguments of Monbiot and Stern. While Monbiot argues that the necessary reductions in global emissions will require a wholesale change in lifestyle, Stern argues that dealing with climate change will mean a reduction in global GDP of a mere 1 per cent. While Monbiot declares that saving the planet challenges the very notion of progress, Stern concludes that ‘tackling climate change is the pro-growth strategy for the longer term’.<sup>10</sup>

One reason for this divergence lies in differing targets. While Monbiot’s goal of 90 per cent cuts by 2030 would limit atmospheric carbon dioxide concentrations to 440 parts per million, Stern considers this to be impossible and sets 550 parts per million as his target. This will require emission cuts of 25 per cent by 2050, including reductions of 60–75 per cent in the power sector. (Stern says that in the longer term, reductions of at least 80 per cent will be needed.) His goal is thus much less ambitious, although still hard to attain. Monbiot feels the need to describe in great detail exactly how and where the cuts should occur. Stern is confident that once a powerful signal is sent to the market, then the market will find a way to carry out the restructuring of the energy economy. There are reasons to believe that Stern is correct. In fifty years’ time the world will be dramatically different: if a strong signal can be sent now, there are grounds for optimism. While we currently have the technologies to reduce the world’s emissions sharply over the next decade or two, by 2050 the market—suitably guided—will present a set of possibilities we cannot foresee. After all, fifty years ago we did not have electronics, television, computers, nuclear power, widespread use of plastics or mass-produced white goods, let alone biotechnology, genetic engineering, nanotechnology or space tourism. Beyond their disagreement over

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<sup>10</sup> Nicholas Stern, *The Economics of Climate Change*, Cambridge 2006, p. ii.

emission reduction goals, the difference between Stern and Monbiot is one of political strategy. Stern wants to persuade reluctant politicians that deep cuts will not be too painful, while Monbiot wants to frighten us into action. Will either strategy work?

It should have been apparent to Stern that his strategy would fail. Although often convened under the banner of economic argumentation, the climate change debate is a clash of ideologies. Stern, trained as an economist and therefore taught that there are no ideologies except wrong ones, failed to understand this. Gordon Brown's willingness to embrace Stern's rhetoric but reluctance to act on his recommendations can only be explained by his reflex privileging of the health of the economy over the health of the environment. (To his credit, Stern resigned.)

Stern himself remained captive to a way of understanding the world peculiar to his profession. After all, for some years economic modelling has shown that the cost of meeting Kyoto targets would be vanishingly small. Even estimates commissioned by the Bush Administration typically conclude that cutting emissions as mandated in the Kyoto Protocol would see the gross national product of the United States reduced by only 1 per cent by 2012. A virtually identical figure was reached by the Howard government in Australia. Bearing in mind these results are five years old, what does this figure mean? If nothing is done and the economy grows at 3 per cent a year over the period, GNP in the US will be about 40 per cent higher by 2012. If policies to reduce emissions as specified in the Kyoto Protocol were implemented, national income would be 39 per cent higher by 2012. Put another way: instead of GNP reaching a level 40 per cent higher by, say, 1 June 2012, if the US ratified Kyoto it would not reach that level until 1 October 2012.

In the face of these minute effects on economic growth, the US and Australia have nevertheless refused to play a part in reducing global emissions. Confronted with a high probability of environmental catastrophe on Earth, the richest people on the planet are unwilling to wait an extra four months to increase their incomes by 40 per cent. Understood this way, hostility to Kyoto appears to be a form of madness. In truth, the results of economic models, even the ones produced by Stern that invert the argument for not acting, are puny in the face of the real reason for rejecting Kyoto: an ideological conviction that nothing must come in the way of growth and corporate interests.

*Heat* is an odd mixture of polemic and analysis—‘green and expert’, one might say—and does not shy away from the moral core of the climate change debate. But in prosecuting the argument, Monbiot at times shares a predisposition with the denialists and fossil fuel lobbyists: an over-emphasis on the failure of individuals to do more to reduce their own contribution to global warming. Monbiot writes that ‘well-meaning people are as capable of destroying the biosphere as the executives of Exxon’.<sup>11</sup> This is a nice line, but who would you rather have in charge of solving global climate change: Anita Roddick or the CEO of Exxon? Roddick may be well-meaning but misguided, whereas the CEO of Exxon is misguided and malicious. Poor understanding can be overcome, but malice cannot.

### *A collective response?*

At times Monbiot is drawn into the most dangerous trap for environmentalists, the recourse to holier-than-thou moralizing. This approach has a peculiar symmetry with orthodox economics: both place far too much responsibility on the shoulders of individuals. Appealing to the idea of ‘revealed preference’, free-market economists argue that if individuals do not make environmentally benign decisions in the marketplace then they do not really care about the environment, no matter how much concern they might express in opinion surveys or over the dinner table. Monbiot too seems to judge us by our decisions in the marketplace. However, it is quite consistent for a person who does not opt to buy green electricity to vote for a party that promises to compel us all to buy it. Insisting on a collective response to a collective problem is far more politically practical and environmentally responsible than a politics of guilt.

Yet Monbiot is a more sophisticated political thinker than many other environmentalists writing on climate change. Among the latter, Tim Flannery abandons hope for political action and concludes in *The Weather Makers* that the only way to solve the climate crisis is for each of us to install solar panels on our roofs.<sup>12</sup> Monbiot does not fall for such political naivety, understanding the frailty of our environmental convictions in the face of the temptations of consumption. ‘Manmade global warming’, he writes, ‘cannot be restrained unless we persuade

<sup>11</sup> Monbiot, *Heat*, p. 172.

<sup>12</sup> Tim Flannery, *The Weather Makers*, London and New York 2006.

the government to force us to change the way we live'.<sup>13</sup> He understands that we are both citizens and consumers, and that consumers will never solve the climate change problem however much politicians might hope otherwise. While Flannery ends his book with a list of 'eleven things you can do' as a consumer, Monbiot urges his readers to join political movements that pressure governments and the big polluters. In his last chapter he writes incisively about why people have not been massing in the streets, or even engaging in guerrilla protests, as they once did. Among other factors, he blames that over-hyped tool of post-modern politics, the internet—which, he writes, 'allows us to believe that we can change the world without leaving our chairs'.<sup>14</sup> By giving the illusion of individual power to desk-bound revolutionaries, the internet has in fact only hastened the erosion of real democratic participation.

However, Monbiot's style and range sometimes risk leaving the reader more disoriented than dazzled. In just four pages, in a chapter that costs his scheme for solving global warming, Monbiot leaps from commentary on fuel price fluctuations to energy demand under different prices, from the opportunity cost of spending on greenhouse abatement to the paucity of aid spending in the UK, from the extent of government subsidies to industry around the world to Bush's Energy Policy Act, from the apparent corruption of EU coal subsidies to the cost of the Iraq War and, finally, peak oil. *Heat* contains two superb chapters, one exposing the sinister tactics of the climate change denial industry and its links to the tobacco lobby, and one on the end of aviation: it is these two that were excerpted at the time of publication. Whilst these may provide enough reason to buy the book, readers of some of the remaining chapters may be disappointed. A work by Monbiot devoted to the politics of climate change would have been a more useful intervention than his opinion on how to achieve 90 per cent cuts in every sector. It is not the only time Monbiot has written a book that claims to solve the world's most intractable problems single-handedly: *The Age of Consent* (2003), described as 'a manifesto for a new world order', set out a detailed blueprint for a new international democratic system, built on principles of justice. In the battle between utopians and realists, my vote always goes to the former; yet not all utopian visions are equal, and Monbiot crossed the line that separates the inspirational from the fanciful.

<sup>13</sup> Monbiot, *Heat*, p. xv.

<sup>14</sup> Monbiot, *Heat*, p. 214.

Monbiot's role tells us something about the state of modern progressive politics after three decades of retreat. Following the decline of the organized left, there remain only a handful of lone intellectuals who are skilled at articulating the failings of a world dominated by neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism. They deserve our gratitude for their commitment, and for resisting attempts by publishers to turn them into celebrities. But they lack a broadly shared vision or intellectual milieu that could discipline the evolution of their thinking. As a columnist George Monbiot is a devastatingly effective critic, but we will need to search elsewhere for the ideas to lead us out of the climate change wilderness.

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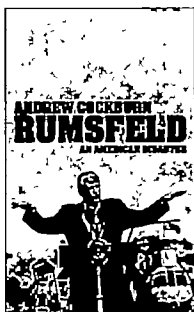
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GEORGE MONBIOT

## ENVIRONMENTAL FEEDBACK

### *A reply to Clive Hamilton*

**I**N HIS REVIEW of *Heat*, Clive Hamilton makes many excellent points, and draws on powerful examples. The image of Texans turning up their air conditioning in order to enjoy a log fire is now printed indelibly on my mind. He correctly identifies the association between consumption and identity, and the threat that the need to tackle climate change presents to the traditional view of progress. I believe he may be right when he says that I have been too harsh in my criticisms of the Kyoto Protocol. But I would, of course, like to contest some of his other claims.

Let me begin—as this underpins all the arguments that follow—by explaining why I have chosen an ‘aggressive target’ for cutting carbon dioxide emissions. Hamilton says that seeking to prevent two degrees of warming above pre-industrial levels is ‘a more ambitious target than most.’ That is not correct. As long ago as 1990, the United Nations Advisory Group on Greenhouse Gases proposed that we should seek to confine the rise to a maximum of 1–2°C.<sup>1</sup> An upper limit of 2°C is the European Union’s stated target, which informs the carbon reductions planned by the UK and most of the governments making serious efforts to tackle climate change.<sup>2</sup>

There is a good reason for this. Two degrees of warming is the point at which up to 4 billion people could suffer water shortages, crop yields could fall in many regions of the poor world, mountain glaciers disappear worldwide and the irreversible melting of the Greenland ice sheet, which could eventually raise global sea levels by 7 metres, is expected to begin.<sup>3</sup> It is also the point at which several important positive feedbacks

could be triggered. The permafrost of the West Siberian peat bog, for example, contains 70 billion tonnes of methane, a powerful greenhouse gas.<sup>4</sup> If all of it were released, its warming effect would equate to 73 years of current manmade carbon dioxide emissions. The methane that escapes due to melting would accelerate global warming, melting more permafrost, which releases more methane. A two-degree rise in temperatures could cause the runaway warming of permafrost throughout the Arctic Circle.

For this and other reasons—including the die-back of tropical forest, the accelerating metabolism of soil bacteria, a reduction of the earth's reflectivity as ice melts—two degrees of manmade warming could cause a total impact of three degrees; and three degrees could lead inexorably to four. In other words, if two degrees of warming takes place, the problem is snatched from our hands. The biosphere becomes a major source of greenhouse gases, and there will be little we can do to prevent further climate change. Two degrees is the only target worth setting.

But while governments might agree that we should strive to keep temperatures below this threshold, they and their advisers fudge the means by which this should be done. Sir Nicholas Stern, for example, spells out the dire consequences of two degrees of warming. He then recommends a target for atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases of 550 parts per million, when measured as 'carbon dioxide equivalent' (CO<sub>2</sub>e). Stern admits that this concentration would produce 'at least a 77 per cent chance—and perhaps up to a 99 per cent chance, depending on the climate model used—of a global average temperature rise exceeding 2°C.' It would also give us a '30–70 per cent' chance of exceeding 3° and 'a 24 per cent chance that temperatures will exceed 4°C'.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Frank Rijsberman and Robert Swart, eds, *Targets and Indicators of Climatic Change: Report of Working Group II of the Advisory Group on Greenhouse Gases*, Stockholm 1990.

<sup>2</sup> Council of the European Union, Information note 7242/05, 11 March 2005.

<sup>3</sup> These projections are taken from the Meteorological Office, *International Symposium on the Stabilization of Greenhouse Gases*, April 2005, table 3: 'Major Impacts of Climate Change on the Earth System'; Sir Nicholas Stern, *The Economics of Climate Change*, Cambridge 2006; the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *Climate Change 2007. The Physical Science Basis*, February 2007.

<sup>4</sup> Fred Pearce, 'Climate warning as Siberia melts', *New Scientist*, 11 August 2005.

<sup>5</sup> Stern, *Economics of Climate Change*, pp. iii, 295.



In other words, 550ppm CO<sub>2</sub>e is the wrong target, as Stern must know. He is not alone. At a meeting I attended in 2005, Sir David King, the British government's chief scientist, proposed that a 'reasonable' target for stabilizing carbon dioxide in the atmosphere was 550ppm CO<sub>2</sub> (which means approximately 630ppm CO<sub>2</sub>e). It would be 'politically unrealistic', he said, to demand anything lower.<sup>6</sup> Simon Retallack from the Institute for Public Policy Research reminded Sir David that his duty is not to convey political reality but to represent scientific reality. King replied that if he recommended a lower limit, he would lose credibility with the government. It seemed to me that his credibility as a scientific adviser had just disappeared without trace.

So while two degrees remains the nominal upper limit, repeatedly cited by government ministers, politics, not science, informs the carbon reductions they propose in order not to exceed it. The calculations I explain in *Heat*, which any numerate person can replicate, estimate the cut demanded by the science. Hamilton says that the result—a worldwide reduction of 60 per cent—is 'far beyond the cuts proposed by anyone else'. This is also incorrect. A paper published recently in the journal *Climatic Change* shows that in order to obtain a 50 per cent chance of preventing the global average temperature from rising by 2° above its pre-industrial level, we require a global cut of 80 per cent by 2050.<sup>7</sup>

### *Carrot juice and wishful thinking*

Having tried to identify the reduction the science demands, I then seek to discover how it could be implemented. This, rather than a determination to be 'audacious', is what leads me into conflict with other environmentalists. If, as I believe we must, we are to place the effort to prevent runaway climate change at the top of the political agenda, we will have to make some hard choices. A 90 per cent cut across the economy of rich nations will require a cut of approximately 90 per cent in every major sector. If, for example, the carbon dioxide produced by land transport, which currently accounts for 22 per cent of the UK's emissions,

<sup>6</sup> Sir David King, speech to the 'Decarbonizing the UK' conference, Westminster, 21 September 2005.

<sup>7</sup> Nathan Rive et al, 'To what extent can a long-term temperature target guide near-term climate change commitments?', *Climatic Change*, vol. 82, nos 3–4 (2007), pp. 373–91, Table 1.

were to be reduced by only 50 per cent, emissions across the rest of the economy would have to be cut by 98.2 per cent. While I believe that 90 per cent is just within the realm of political possibility, 98.2 per cent lies well beyond it. We cannot afford to favour any sector.

Anyone seeking a 90 per cent cut in the emissions produced by electricity suppliers quickly runs into a complex and intractable problem. Unlike most of the other commodities we buy, which can be stockpiled and then delivered when we want them, electricity—being difficult and expensive to store—must be produced at the very moment of demand. If either too much or too little is generated, the voltage and frequency fluctuations will crash the country's computers. If supply falls below a certain level, the whole system collapses. Not only must it be made when we want it, it must also be made in precisely the quantities we ask for.

Like other environmentalists, I would be happiest if all the electricity on the grid were supplied by means of renewable energy. But the wind does not blow, the waves do not rise and the sun does not shine on demand. In the UK, for example, electricity demand peaks between 5pm and 7pm on winter evenings. Those who advocate turning the UK into a solar economy would do well to take note of this. If we switched our entire electricity-generating network over to variable sources of renewable power, there would be a power cut whenever the wind or waves dropped. There are a few 'non-variable' renewable sources, such as biomass and geothermal energy, but their supply is limited (except in Iceland). Though the research on this issue is sparse, it appears reasonable to assume that a maximum of 50 per cent of any electricity supply can be produced by renewables. So where is the rest to come from?

Hamilton does not tell us. He tells us only what he does not like: carbon capture and storage. But if electricity users are not to be subject to repeated blackouts and equipment failure (which would make our proposals politically unfeasible), the question must be answered. Unless we discover a magical new source of fuel, it comes down to an unfortunate choice between nuclear power and burning fossil fuel with capture and storage.

I am less hostile to nuclear power than I used to be. I no longer believe that uranium is about to run out or that the safe disposal of nuclear waste is impossible. But every state which has sought to develop a nuclear

weapons programme since the non-proliferation treaty was signed—Israel, South Africa, India, Pakistan, North Korea, Iraq and Iran—has done so by diverting resources from its civil nuclear programme. Like most of the world's people, I would like to see complete multilateral nuclear disarmament. This is almost impossible while fissile materials are still processed for use in nuclear power stations. Eisenhower's programme for beating the nuclear sword into the nuclear ploughshare has achieved just the opposite.

So I place nuclear power second on my list of preferences. My first choice is the burning of natural gas with carbon capture and storage, and my third the burning of coal with CCS. Hamilton calls carbon capture 'a political ruse first and foremost', but the real ruse is to pretend that no ugly technology has to be selected; that a modern economy can be run on carrot juice and wishful thinking. He argues that carbon and storage is 'likely to be more expensive than existing alternatives'. Which alternatives does he have in mind? If you want to generate large quantities of non-variable, low-carbon electricity, there is only one. Is he quietly endorsing nuclear power? If so, he should tell us, and be bold enough to take some of the flak that anyone prepared to make this tough choice attracts.

I have often noticed a hostility among environmentalists to technological solutions that permit industrial processes to continue. I cannot help wondering whether this accounts for Hamilton's preference for my chapter on aviation, in which I discover that there is no technological answer to the problem, over my chapters on housing, electricity, heat and land transport, in which I find that there are solutions.

### *Death and taxes*

Now I must enter the real shark pool: the economics of climate change. It would be polite to say that they are uncertain, more accurate to say that in most cases they are bogus. The calculations Stern uses, for example, are nonsensical. On one side of the equation are the costs of preventing climate change, most of which take the form of investments in new technologies and disinvestments from old ones. These are quite easily quantified. On the other side are the costs of climate change. Some of these are financial—food prices could rise, sea walls will need to be built. But most of them are costs which have hitherto been regarded as

incalculable: the destruction of ecosystems and human communities; the displacement of people from their homes; disease and death. These are all thrown together by Sir Nicholas with a formula he calls 'equivalent to a reduction in consumption', to which he then attaches a price. The global disaster unleashed by a 5–6° rise in temperature is 'equivalent to a reduction in consumption' of 5–20 per cent.

In what way is it equivalent? It is true that as people begin to starve they will consume less; when they die they cease to consume altogether. I can accept that a unit of measurement allowing us to compare the human costs of different spending decisions might be necessary. But Stern's unit—a reduction in consumption—incorporates everything from the price of eggs to the pain of bereavement. He then translates it into a 'social cost of carbon', measured in dollars. He has, in other words, put a price on human life. Worse still, he has ensured that this price is lost among the other prices: when we read that the 'social cost of carbon' is \$30 a tonne, we don't know—unless we read the whole report—how much of this is made of human lives.

This methodology leads to a disastrous consequence, unintended but surely obvious. Stern's report shows that the dollar losses from failing to prevent a high degree of global warming outweigh the dollar savings arising from not taking action. It therefore makes economic sense to try to prevent runaway climate change. But what if the result had been different? What if he had discovered that the profits accruing from burning more fossil fuels exceeded the social cost of carbon? We would then find that it makes economic sense to kill people.

Ridiculous as this sounds, it was, in effect, the conclusion of another report commissioned by the UK Treasury, written by the former chief executive of British Airways, Sir Rod Eddington.<sup>8</sup> Asked to advise the government on the links between transport and the UK's economic growth, Eddington found that even when the costs of climate change, as calculated by Stern, are taken into account, the total costs of expanding the UK's airports and road networks are lower than the amount of money to be made. Though he never spelt it out in these terms (I can find no evidence in his report that he has even understood the implications), Eddington discovered that

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<sup>8</sup> HM Treasury, *The Eddington Transport Study*, December 2006.

it makes economic sense for other people—mostly Africans and Asians—to die in order that we in the developed world can travel more.

So when I mock the Department of Transport's suggestion that the aviation industry should 'pay the external costs its activities impose on society at large'<sup>9</sup> by asking whether a steward should be sacrificed every time someone in Ethiopia dies of hunger, I do not think it is fair to call this a cheap shot. It is a deeply serious point. Like Stern and Eddington, the Department appears to believe that it can cost human life, and that this cost can be discharged by paying a certain sum in pounds or euros. I find this formula both fanciful and repugnant.

### *The aesthetic fallacy*

Hamilton misrepresents the reasons I give for choosing one system of financial incentives over its competitors. I do not argue that 'the European Emissions Trading Scheme is flawed because it allows polluters to avoid cutting their carbon emissions, by paying others to cut theirs'. I believe that trade of this kind is necessary if initial cuts are to be expedited. I argue that it is flawed because it is an act of enclosure. By handing out CO<sub>2</sub> emissions permits, free of charge, to the European companies that pollute most, it ensured not only that the polluter was paid, but also that something which belongs to all of us—the right, within the system, to produce a certain amount of carbon dioxide—was given to the corporations.

I favour carbon rationing because it is a much fairer scheme: it allocates an equal entitlement to pollute to all people. One plausible scheme would ration 40 per cent of the national carbon target equally between citizens, purely for buying fuel and electricity. The other 60 per cent would be auctioned to companies for the same purpose, and all allocations would be tradeable.<sup>10</sup> Those who use less than their entitlement can sell the surplus to those who use more. As, by and large, the poor use less energy than the rich, it is likely to result in a redistribution of wealth. Energy taxes, by contrast, hit the poor hardest. It is true, as Hamilton contends, that this proposal 'would again allow rich

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<sup>9</sup> Department for Transport White Paper, *The Future of Air Transport*, December 2003, p. 10.

<sup>10</sup> Devised by Mayer Hillman and refined by David Fleming; see *Heat*, p. 45.

lifestyles to continue, largely unimpeded'. But my scheme for tackling climate change has only one purpose: to tackle climate change. It must be fair and progressive, because that is what would make it politically plausible. But it is not an attempt at social engineering. Let us hammer the rich by other means, but let us not confuse this programme with an attempt to cut carbon emissions. Fighting global warming is hard enough already.

Is it true that I over-emphasize people's failure to do more to reduce their own greenhouse gas emissions? I think, if anything, I understate it. Even if I were to strip out the occasional flights I take—hypocritically or paradoxically, depending on your point of view—in order to speak about climate change in other countries, and even though I cycle and take the train, my own emissions are three or four times higher than the sustainable level. And I do better than most environmentalists. The middle-class greens I know still fly to the Canaries for their holidays. One environmentalist flies from the UK to Thailand to have his colon irrigated. Others drive ancient Volvos or sporty convertibles. Some of them have not even bothered to replace their incandescent light-bulbs. We are all stinking hypocrites.

It does not matter whether we burn fossil fuels with malice or with love. As far as the atmosphere is concerned, it is not concerned. It is a collection of gases. Either we contribute to the total volume of some of these gases or we do not. What I see among most 'caring' people is mere tokenism. They might buy eco-friendly washing-up liquid and organic cotton pyjamas, but they still consume as much fossil fuel as their incomes allow. This is why we require a total cap on national carbon emissions, and a system—such as carbon rationing—for distributing them. Hamilton describes this analysis as 'holier-than-thou moralizing'. I see it as confronting some uncomfortable truths.

I do not mean to sound rigid. But the constraints—technical, economic, social and political—which affect our ability to crack this problem are tight. We cannot afford to accommodate special interests and other agendas. We must not succumb, as many environmentalists do, to the aesthetic fallacy: choosing those solutions which appeal to their tastes and beliefs, rather than those which work best. Nor should we extrapolate from our own experience. The environmental press is swarming with people (most of whom live alone) who claim to have reduced their

own emissions to the desired level, then demand that everyone else follow their example—unaware that self-enforced abstinence is both ineffective and, for most people, unattractive.

Except for when he rejects carbon capture and storage, I do not accuse Hamilton of any of this. His contribution to our understanding of environmental politics has been felt all over the world, and his essay enhances our understanding of the problem. To identify the best means of preventing runaway climate change, our proposals and methods must be debated fiercely. Our criticisms of unfeasible solutions should be severe. But we have so little time.

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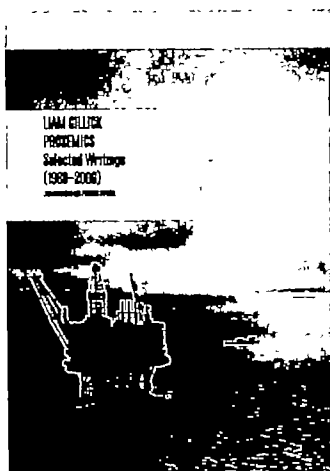
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## UNNATURAL HISTORY

**A**FTER A COMPARATIVE lull in the 1990s, when free-market propagandists announced the imminent realization of the best of all possible worlds, dramatic ecological warnings have once again taken centre stage in the news media. Now that there is an overwhelming consensus among scientists, politicians and journalists that the rise in temperatures can no longer be regarded as one of the normal, periodic fluctuations in the earth's climate, a new natural history seems to be in the making: from sandstorms sweeping through Beijing to constantly flooding rivers in Central Europe, from melting polar ice-caps to rising sea-levels, there is no shortage of natural events that seem disturbingly unnatural. Climate change, however, is merely the most dramatic of a number of developments—genetic technology being another—that change nature to an unprecedented degree.

In a situation in which nature is apparently being changed through human interventions while, conversely, human culture is increasingly dominated by this new nature, it is of crucial importance to reconsider the relationship between natural and human history, and to arrive at a more historicized conception of nature than occurs in popular science discourse—which naturalizes culture by focusing on the unchanging, animal side of the 'naked ape'. There have been some attempts to do this—notably by Francis Fukuyama, who in 1989 appropriated Kojève's appropriation of Hegel to proclaim the end of history, but now observes that 'there can be no end of history without an end of modern natural science and technology'.<sup>1</sup> History reasserts itself in the form of genetic research, which alters human nature itself, raising numerous questions about human rights and citizenship. While many either celebrate or fret about 'our posthuman future', to quote the title of Fukuyama's 2002 book, others have sought to chart, as it were, our human non-future; examples include Al Gore's film *An Inconvenient Truth* and Nicholas

Stern's report for the UK Treasury on climate change. For ecological collapse threatens the survival, if not of our species, then at least of the current social order.

Both attempts at historicization are, however, limited by their general adherence to a liberal conception of history, in which the ideal marriage of a democratic nation-state and a capitalist economy is still the ultimate goal, the only desirable future. While the Stern report emphasizes the need for forms of planning and regulation, for instance through carbon trading schemes, others maintain that the economic regime that caused the problem—or at least significantly contributed to it—will also provide the cure. If increased pollution is indeed a by-product of the incredible inventiveness set free by capitalism, capitalism will also create the means of fighting pollution, giving rise to cleaner and less wasteful forms of production and consumption. There are opportunities for growth even in the green sector. In this way, the new nature is reintegrated in the symbolic edifice, as capitalism once more proves its adaptability.

In his early essay on 'The Idea of Natural History', Theodor Adorno stated that 'the question of the relationship between nature and history only stands a chance of being answered when one succeeds in *understanding historical being, even in its utmost historical determinacy, as a natural [naturhaftes] being, or in grasping nature as historical being, even where it is apparently most resistant and static.*'<sup>2</sup> Adorno notes that he uses 'nature' as more or less synonymous with 'myth', both terms standing for life in the grip of fate, subject to fear, before humanity asserted control over nature.<sup>3</sup> Current discourse, inflected by popularizers of Darwin, to some extent follows Adorno's deconstruction of the identification of nature with dumb, mythical being: nature is itself already historical. But whereas Adorno also argued that human history results in another nature, in a return of myth, contemporary conceptualizations of the new, unnatural natural history often avoid probing the deadlocks of a culture still absorbing the shockwaves of the new nature. These omissions work to undermine possibilities for radical change, even while signalling imminent collapse. On the rare occasions when historical changes in nature are noted in today's discourse, these are integrated

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<sup>1</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *Our Posthuman Future: Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution*, New York 2002, p. 15.

<sup>2</sup> Theodor Adorno, 'Die Idee der Naturgeschichte' [1933], in Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 1, Frankfurt am Main 1973, pp. 354–5; emphasis in original.

<sup>3</sup> Adorno, 'Idee der Naturgeschichte', p. 345.

into the 'natural being' of the current regime, rather than used to question its quasi-natural status.

The musings of liberal authors such as Jared Diamond are typical in this respect: comparing 'ecocides' in various historical and contemporary societies, Diamond tries to draw lessons that can be applied to the approaching global ecological disaster, but his comparative approach and focus on social, biological and psychological invariants robs the current situation of much of its specificity. In the end we are only left with consoling 'examples of courageous leaders and courageous people' who did the right thing.<sup>4</sup> For today's liberals, the collapse of the existing order can solely be imagined in biological and ecological terms; social and political change can only take the form of minor adjustments. Even an author as concerned and informed as Diamond is unable to think beyond this limit. The free market or 'liberal democracy' appears as a second nature whose collapse would be more dramatic than that of the physical environment.

Within these constraints, however, dark scenarios can still emerge. In 2006, Oliver Curry, LSE-based editor of *Darwinism Today*, predicted that 100,000 years into the future, the human race will be divided into two separate races—termed 'gracile' and 'robust'. As the BBC reported, 'the descendants of the genetic upper class would be tall, slim, healthy, attractive, intelligent, creative, and a far cry from the "underclass" humans who would have evolved into dim-witted, ugly, squat goblin-like creatures.'<sup>5</sup> While this breeding fantasy in the spirit of H. G. Wells's Morlocks and Eloi makes no explicit reference to genetic engineering, it is clear that one of the elite's advantages is having access to advanced technology in this and other fields. In spite—or because—of its delusional qualities, the 'two races' scenario shows the limits of well-meaning liberal narratives, in which the means of containing threats to the current order are seen to lie in that very order. Its bluntness at least has the advantage of making explicit what remains hidden in paeans to the problem-solving power of capitalism: in an age of collapse, the odds are far from even, both within Western societies and on a global scale.

Contemporary culture is often branded ahistorical, seen as marked by repetitious vogues and industrial nostalgia. This condition seems now to

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<sup>4</sup> Jared Diamond, *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed*, New York 2005, p. 440.

<sup>5</sup> 'Human species "may split in two"', BBC News website, 17 October 2006.

have dissipated, with history reasserting itself as natural history in a period of global political and economic turmoil. But despite the consensus that global warming cannot be ascribed to normal fluctuations in the earth's temperature, the human and therefore social and political components of this process have been minimized; man-made nature is re-naturalized, the new (un)natural history presented as fate. The truly terrifying notion is not that it is irreversible, but that it actually might be reversible—at the cost of radically changing the economic and social order.

### *Awful changes*

A major point of reference in Adorno's 'The Idea of Natural History' is Benjamin's work on the *Trauerspiel*, in which the latter attributed to Baroque drama a conception of history as a process of ruin, subject to elementary forces of nature. It is telling that Benjamin draws a parallel between Baroque and Romanticism as the two great anti-Classical tendencies. At the turn of the nineteenth century, the Baroque fixation on *Vergänglichkeit*—a notion of transience that had served as a religious memento mori—was transformed into the scientific investigation of nature as liable to dramatic change.<sup>6</sup> This period saw a radical historicization of nature and the abandonment of Biblical chronology in favour of what would later be termed 'deep time'—a long natural history preceding the emergence of the human race, populated by creatures that were reconstructed by Georges Cuvier, William Buckland and others. 'Natural time' was no longer that of seasonal cycles; such returns were now plotted on a historical axis of previously unimaginable scale. However, this axis in turn was beset by cataclysmic convulsions that suggested a repetitive pattern, Human culture itself was now a potential ruin; at the end of the century, H. G. Wells would send his time traveller to the post-human future of the Morlocks and Eloi. Past stages of life were also brought to life again, in phantasmal scenes of deep time created by artists and writers.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Adorno, 'Idee der Naturgeschichte', pp. 357–8; Walter Benjamin, 'Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels' [1928], in Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 1, part 1, Frankfurt am Main 1991, pp. 352–3.

<sup>7</sup> On deep time iconography, see Stephen Jay Gould, *Time's Arrow/Time's Cycle: Myth and Metaphor in the Discovery of Geological Time*, Cambridge, MA and London 1987; Martin Rudwick, *Scenes from Deep Time: Early Pictorial Representations of the Prehistoric World*, Chicago and London 1992.

Among the many nineteenth-century visualizations of 'antediluvian' scenes, Henry de la Beche's 1830 illustration of various ichthyosaurs and other prehistoric creatures engaged in a proto-Darwinist struggle for life was particularly influential. In a clear and humorous style that others would soon abandon in favour of heavy drama, de la Beche—who was part of the geological and paleontological vanguard of the period—depicted a prehistoric dog-eat-dog world, a marine orgy of hyperactive beaks and writhing bodies, in which no animal ever seems to have a moment of rest.<sup>8</sup> In its more garish versions, this iconography became popular from the 1840s onwards, also occurring in literature: a similar battle takes place in Jules Verne's *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* (1864) while the heroes are crossing an underground lake—past moments of deep time preserved in the bowels of the earth.<sup>9</sup> In Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Lost World* and its 1922 film adaptation, dinosaurs have survived through the ages on an isolated plateau; in *King Kong*—essentially *Lost World* with an added ape—they live on a remote island.

Such fictions, in which dinosaurs and other prehistoric animals turn out to be less than extinct, can be related to a well-known satirical example of deep-time iconography, again by Henry de la Beche. Its heading announces 'Awful changes', and it shows a 'Professor Ichthyosaurus' lecturing to his fellow creatures about a human skull, said to have 'belonged to some of the lower orders of animals'. This 1830 cartoon of the 'Reappearance of Ichthyosauri' was once thought to refer to the famous geologist William Buckland, but Stephen Jay Gould has shown that it is a barb aimed at Charles Lyell, who advocated a cyclic model for the earth's history in the early editions of his influential *Principles of Geology*.<sup>10</sup> Lyell refused to accept that the geological records suggest directionality—an evolution of species from the simple to the more complex, with certain species becoming extinct. He argued that while environmental shifts might cause periodic changes in the fauna of a region, none were final. In the passage lampooned by de la Beche, Lyell claimed that creatures very similar to the ichthyosaurs, and dinosaurs

<sup>8</sup> Rudwick, *Scenes from Deep Time*, pp. 64–7; while de la Beche's depiction of ancient Dorset—*Duria antiquior*—is certainly whimsical, Rudwick's description of the image as 'cheerful' and 'neoclassical' plays down the Hoffmannesque and uncanny qualities of the image, which must have been even more pronounced for viewers unaccustomed to seeing prehistoric animals.

<sup>9</sup> See David Standish, *Hollow Earth*, Cambridge, MA 2006, pp. 132–236.

<sup>10</sup> Gould, *Time's Arrow*, pp. 89–179.

whose skeletons were being discovered on the Dorset coast and in quarries, might yet live in remote parts of the world—and might show up again in England when conditions once more suited them.

### *Lost worlds*

The non-directional vision that Lyell attempted to impose on deep time could be seen as a *répétition du mythe*, a regressive reassertion of a cyclic worldview, as Benjamin characterized nineteenth-century theories of eternal return, Nietzsche's foremost among them.<sup>11</sup> But Nietzsche's idea was itself a late, Pythagorean version of the cyclical conception of time, which modern mythologists such as Eliade identified with traditional societies. Eliade argues that the latter managed to keep the 'terror of history' at bay by conceiving of time as the cyclic repetition of archetypes, of events and symbols belonging to a primeval period when gods or mythic ancestors walked the earth. In Ancient Greece, pre-Socratic thinkers—the Pythagoreans foremost—radicalized this approach with the notion that everything will eternally recur; every moment in effect becomes an archetype that will return countless times.<sup>12</sup> However, Nietzsche concluded that ancient Pythagorean notions of eternal repetition are hardly applicable to historical events, which are in many ways specific and unique. A genuine repetition of such events would only be possible if the earth were to start its 'drama' anew after the first act; this is what the later Nietzsche gambled on with his doctrine of the eternal return.<sup>13</sup>

Nietzsche's struggle with the notion of an eternal return had started in the early 1870s, as he was reflecting precisely on the nineteenth century's infatuation with history. He speculated that historicism might yet prove to be productive; if one realized that the Renaissance had been created by a mere hundred men, such a breakthrough might be repeated. Deleuze argued that Nietzsche's 'abysmal' notion of the eternal return takes the concept to its extreme, emphasizing that eternal recurrence not based on mythic archetypes can only lead to signs without referent,

<sup>11</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Das Passagen-Werk* [1927–40], in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 5, part 1, Frankfurt am Main 1991, pp. 177–8.

<sup>12</sup> Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return: Cosmos and History* [1954], Princeton 2005, pp. 89, 119–23.

<sup>13</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen II: Vom Nutzen und Nachtheil der Historie für das Leben* [1874], in Nietzsche, *Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 3, part 1, Berlin 1972, p. 237.

and hence to difference.<sup>14</sup> While modern culture 'remythifies' repetition by using either specific historical models or clichéd templates that function as industrial archetypes, its quasi-cyclic recurrence is not a closed system. Under the impact of historical shocks, the repetitions of mass culture may produce unnatural mutations that serve as signs and portents of change—as exemplified by recurrent motifs of nineteenth- and twentieth-century deep-time fiction.

Doyle's *The Lost World* might initially be seen as a fictional realization of Lyell's myth of eternal return—in a climate befitting them, and cut off from their enemies, dinosaurs have indeed survived. However, the ideological subtext is decidedly un-Lyellian. Doyle's work is deeply ingrained with imperialist progressivism: white British explorers finding a freak of nature that gives insight into natural history rather than undermining history, a time capsule that does not undo directionality. Rather than depicting the survival of isolated pockets of deep time, meanwhile, *Jurassic Park* and its sequels show the reconstruction of extinct species, courtesy of modern technology. As instances of new, manmade nature spinning dangerously out of control, these dinosaurs stand in for tsunamis, rising sea levels and desertification. Clones of old genetic models, the neo-dinosaurs naturalize the unnatural new nature; but the fact that they quickly escape from human control suggests that recurrence can shatter a given state of affairs. A similar mix of forward- and backward-looking elements is to be found in J. G. Ballard's 1962 novel, *The Drowned World*, which depicts a world being made uninhabitable by rising temperatures and sea levels. The cause of this is not science gone awry, but a 'sudden instability of the sun.'<sup>15</sup> In this respect, Ballard may seem to be looking backward, shying away from addressing man-made environmental collapse. However, the very fact that the cause of environmental change in Ballard's early novels—including his superior *The Crystal World*—is utterly uncontrollable, and sometimes unknown, creates an uncanny sense of an unnatural history in the making.

Such deep-time fantasies, which restore historicity to nature by means of cyclical returns, are an obvious source for current discourse on climate change. Scenarios of the future are riddled with ideological fictions;

<sup>14</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Différence et répétition*, Paris 1968. Deleuze was building on the brilliant essays of Pierre Klossowski in *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle* [1969], London 2005.

<sup>15</sup> J. G. Ballard, *The Drowned World* [1962], London 1999, p. 70.

many, in fact, try to marshal the power of these fictions for their purposes. Ballard's vision of a future half-submerged London has cinematic offspring that include *Waterworld* (1995) and Kubrick/Spielberg's *A.I.* (2001), as well as Al Gore's depiction of New York being inundated. Gore and others make pragmatic use of deep-time fiction to try to make 'us' aware of the risks of our Western lifestyle, if we do not mend our ways (though we should remain loyal consumers in order to keep the economy going). But they refrain from foregrounding and questioning their own status. Content to dramatize the dangerous direction in which nature is heading due to human interventions, they nonetheless view these interventions as specific practices that cause pollution, and only marginally or intermittently as symptoms of a society as thoroughly unstable as the new nature they seek to address. They thus offer no fundamental alternative to the suggestion that the course taken by nature due to human activities is as inevitable and unchangeable as the trajectory of society itself.

Social disasters are naturalized and 'natural' disasters are seen as man-made but not open to intervention—society in turn being perceived as subject to quasi-natural fatality. In this context, the time of capitalist modernity unfolds as a dialectic of cataclysmic repetitions and a linearity whose apparent inevitability is itself mythical, as Benjamin saw very clearly. If the culture industry's repetitions can register and suggest change, then change itself becomes another form of mythical fate, distributing wealth and health to some, disaster to others. Seeing New Orleans destroyed by Hurricane Katrina, one need not reach for conspiracy theories concerning the incompetence of the Bush Administration and FEMA to conclude that all parties effectively acted as if trying to cement the belief that both nature and society, as second nature, are so far beyond control as to make any attempt at intervention an exercise in futility.

### *Second natures*

Both in 'The Idea of Natural History' and much later, in *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno relied on the young Lukács's Marxian reading of the Hegelian concept of second nature. This signified an 'alienated, dead world', a reified representation of impoverished social relationships.<sup>16</sup> Here 'second nature' comes to stand for the ossified products of human labour, as a fetishistic spectacle of apparently autonomous artifacts beyond human

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<sup>16</sup> Adorno, 'Idee der Naturgeschichte', pp. 355–6.



control—while ‘first nature’ itself, subjected as it is by science, undergoes a similar process. If this Lukácsian–Adornian take on second nature differs from earlier, Idealist uses, these were already varied: whereas Hegel remained close to the common meaning of second nature as ‘convention’, the later Schelling historicized the concept.

‘Second nature’ has a long history as a signifier for ‘convention’, from Cicero through to Montaigne and Pascal, but it gained a new meaning, and new urgency, with Rousseau—and with the simplified interpretation of Rousseau’s thought as demanding a ‘return to nature’, conceived as a state of grace and innocence. In the historical turn of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century thinking, ‘second nature’ came to be seen—by Schiller, among others—as the potential reassertion in human society of something resembling the immediacy and harmony of nature, possibly with the aid of art.<sup>17</sup> Hegel, of course, is strictly against such a conceptualization of second nature. Crucially, for him, the bad immediacy of ‘first nature’ has been shattered, and there can be no return to it; attempts to reform morality and customs ‘in accordance with nature’ are extremely dubious. Stating that the system of law is ‘a second nature’ insofar as it is not just externally imposed but lived, he considers that *das Sittliche*—what is morally just—becomes a *Sitte*: a custom, second nature. If the grip of habit becomes too strong, its effects are negative. Hegel notes that ‘man also dies out of habit’, and that Spirit itself is movement, shattering the sameness of nature. Speaking of ancient Egypt, he stresses that a state of civilization in which everything is fixed and conventional, a comfortably inhabited second nature, is ‘against the nature of the Spirit’; it is Spirit’s historical task to shatter such complacent habits.<sup>18</sup>

Whereas Hegel’s conception of second nature is still indebted to its old meaning of ‘convention’, Schelling effectively uses ‘second nature’ as a synonym for Spirit and its historical unfolding. As Schelling puts it in the final version of the *Philosophy of Mythology*, human history amounts to a second creation.<sup>19</sup> Nature pales in comparison to this new form of history—it is a closed circle, a realm without history. He repeatedly

<sup>17</sup> See Norbert Rath, *Zweite Natur. Konzepte einer Vermittlung von Natur und Kultur in Anthropologie und Ästhetik um 1800*, Munster 1996.

<sup>18</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Grundlagen der Philosophie des Rechts oder Naturrecht und Staatsrecht im Grundrisse* (Werke, vol. 7), Frankfurt am Main 1970, p. 302; and *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte* (Werke, vol. 12), Frankfurt am Main 1970, p. 255.

<sup>19</sup> F. W. J. Schelling, *Philosophie der Mythologie* (part 2) in *Schellings Werke. Fünfter Ergänzungsband*, Munich 1943, p. 10.

states that the creation was the result of the dialectical interplay of three *Potenzen*, powers or potencies that are three aspects of God: pure *Seinkönnen* (what-can-be) or the subject, pure *Sein* (being) or the object, and the subject-object that is the *Geist*. In the absolute, before creation, these potencies were latent; they were activated by an immemorial act, a transition from latent *Wille* (will) to active *Wollen* (wanting) around which Schelling's late work circles.<sup>20</sup> While these three powers and their dialectical movements have their equivalents in Hegel's thought, Schelling argues that Hegel's dialectics remained merely logical, that Hegelian philosophy, starting from the idea, can never come to terms with the act of creation itself, nor with actual history.<sup>21</sup> The third potency—that of Spirit, which is self-conscious *Können* or the complete manifestation of the subject in the object—triumphs in human consciousness. This is 'the end of nature', the emergence of 'a second world, the spiritual one' in human consciousness, above nature.<sup>22</sup>

While Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* stresses the progressive spiritualization and thus the historicity of nature, this movement could only go so far; in the end, nature settled into cyclic patterns that were to be shattered by human history. However, Schelling still conceives of the theogonic process in the human mind—the gradual revelation of God in mythology—as a natural process, because it is a causal chain of events in that mind, rather than a direct divine revelation.<sup>23</sup> In this respect his work reflects the developments of the early nineteenth century, when 'natural history' became historical in the modern sense. When Schelling conceives of human history—as encapsulated in mythology—as natural history, he is applying the new paradigm to the former, even while downplaying the historicity of 'first nature'. Mythology as a succession

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<sup>20</sup> The system of the three potencies is discussed and developed throughout the late *Philosophie der Mythologie* and *Philosophie der Offenbarung*, repeatedly given as lecture courses during the 1830s and 40s, and published posthumously. See for instance *Philosophie der Offenbarung*, in *Schellings Werke, Sechster Ergänzungsband*, Munich 1954, chapters 4, 5 and 8 (pp. 55–93, 147–74).

<sup>21</sup> See the extensive criticism of Hegel delivered in the Berlin version of the lectures on Revelation, delivered in 1841–42, known through Paulus's transcript, published as F. W. J. Schelling, *Philosophie der Offenbarung* 1841/42, Frankfurt am Main 1977, pp. 121–39.

<sup>22</sup> Schelling, *Philosophie der Offenbarung* 1841/42, p. 107.

<sup>23</sup> See F. W. J. Schelling, *Philosophie der Mythologie* (part 1), in *Schellings Werke, Sechster Hauptband: Schriften zur Religionsphilosophie* 1841–1854, Munich 1927, pp. 378–9.

of gods, as historical polytheism, is shaped by the interplay of the three potencies, but these act now as purely natural causes. Man, he argues, wanted to rule freely over the three potencies, but instead came to be ruled by them. Slowly extracting himself from his fallen state, Man developed a mythology that enabled the human mind to rise to a level where, finally, he is ready for the true (Christian) Revelation. Schelling's notion of second nature thus oscillated between the end of nature on the one hand, and on the other, the reassertion of nature in human history—a move conceived in terms of natural history, as a natural process.

Schelling's parade of gods and mythologies—whose sequence is supposed to reflect the successive dominance of the three potencies, leading up to the Revelation—may seem singularly irrelevant both to nineteenth-century and to present concerns; but he comes surprisingly close to Adorno in questioning the dichotomy of ahistorical myth/nature and 'historical being'.<sup>24</sup> For all its oneiric qualities, Schelling's concept of second nature provides impulses for reflection: do not the ideologues of the free market effectively invoke a 'second creation' that causes this market and its political superstructure to develop in a quasi-autonomous way? The succession of mythologies has given way to economic logic; even those who are opposed to laissez-faire capitalism and favour some degree of regulation—for instance in the fields of biological research and climate control, like Fukuyama, Stern or Diamond—seem to buy into the naturalization of the current politico-economic order. Despite the fact that this regime has also given rise to a new unnatural history that ravages the planet, and created technologies that alter the substance of humanity itself, responses to these developments nonetheless remain within its bounds. Even if it leads in the end to both social and ecological collapse, two centuries of scientific and fictional scenarios have made such an outcome seem familiar, or even acceptable.

### *Entropic resignation*

The inevitability of the end of life has become a commonplace—notably through popular versions of the notion of entropy, as enshrined in the

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<sup>24</sup> In arguing that 'there is already an implicit historical dynamic in the great myths', Adorno refers to Chronos killing Uranus and being himself dethroned by Zeus, a succession dear to Schelling. Adorno, 'Idee der Naturgeschichte', p. 363.

Second Law of Thermodynamics. As Rudolf Arnheim summarized this development in the early 1970s:

When it began to enter the public consciousness a century or so ago, it suggested an apocalyptic vision of the course of events on Earth. The Second Law stated that the entropy of the world strives towards a maximum, which amounted to saying that the energy in the universe, although constant in amount, was subject to more and more dissipation and degradation. These terms had a distinctly negative ring. They were congenial to a pessimistic mood of the times . . . According to Henry Adams's witty treatise, *The Degradation of the Democratic Dogma*, 'to the vulgar and ignorant historian it meant only that the ash heap was constantly increasing in size'. The sun was getting smaller, the Earth colder, and no day passed without the French or German newspapers 'producing some uneasy discussion of supposed social decrepitude'.<sup>25</sup>

When Arnheim was writing this, the artist Robert Smithson was busy marshalling entropy behind his own anti-Idealist notion of history, in which minimalist sculpture, ruins, urban sprawl, natural disasters and strip mining are so many signs pointing towards an entropic end-time when 'the whole universe will burn out and be transformed into an all-encompassing sameness'.<sup>26</sup> Despite Smithson's postmodern credentials, Jennifer Roberts rightly argues that such a notion not so much resists as it naturalizes 'the concept of a predetermined, eschatological history', and that it provided Smithson 'with a cosmic endorsement for his own aversion to activism, political or otherwise'.<sup>27</sup> Smithson's own monuments to this eagerly anticipated end-time—ranging from the unspectacular 'monuments of Passaic', described and depicted in his famous photo essay, to the 'Spiral Jetty'—remain important. But they can also be seen as part of a questionable project of naturalization: natural history conceived on a grand scale as an inevitable decline and collapse, as a spectacle of destruction contemplated with joyful complicity.

In the Marxist spin on Hegelian conceptions of second nature, from Lukács to Guy Debord, 'social habit' as second nature came to be reinterpreted as commodity fetishism and its ideological illusions. Debord

<sup>25</sup> Rudolf Arnheim, *Entropy and Art: An Essay on Disorder and Order*, Berkeley, CA 1971, p. 9.

<sup>26</sup> Robert Smithson, 'Entropy and the New Monuments' [1966], in Smithson, *The Collected Writings*, Berkeley, CA 1996, p. 11.

<sup>27</sup> Jennifer Roberts, *Mirror Travels: Robert Smithson and History*, New Haven, CT and London 2004, p. 9.

asserted that 'the fetishistic, purely objective appearance of spectacular relations conceals the fact that they are relations among men and classes: a second nature seems to dominate our environment with its fatal laws.' These quasi-natural 'fatal laws' can, on the one hand, appear thoroughly teleological and linear, an inevitable process in which people constantly have to adapt to progress; on the other hand, they can present themselves as an eternal return of economic growth and recession, of war and peace, of work and leisure. The tightly structured and compartmentalized time of the spectacle becomes, as Debord noted, 'quasi-cyclical', but this quasi-cyclical temporality is plotted on its other, the axis of fatalist progress, which is indistinguishable from ruin.<sup>28</sup>

Time and again Robert Smithson referred to dinosaurs and their extinction, lauding artists who illustrated deep-time episodes at the New York Planetarium and the Museum of Natural History for realizing in visual form 'expendable "conceptions" of ultimate catastrophe, based on the more inaccessible regions of "space and time." In their minds they have travelled into the forbidden zones, into the dazzling realms.'<sup>29</sup> From an entropic point of view, the dinosaurs are very much present: we too are dinosaurs. Or are the dinosaurs just certain nations, certain classes? TV reports from hurricane-stricken New Orleans, the majority of whose struggling inhabitants were poor and black, suggested a future primeval landscape in which nature punishes those who have lost out in the economic survival of the fittest.

### *Overman returns*

Foucault and others in his wake have characterized modern society as the regime of biopolitics. In older social formations, the biological human body was not as such the subject of politics; modern biopolitics involves the medicalization of the population, ensuring lower infant mortality and an unprecedented level of health care.<sup>30</sup> As the management of human *bios*, biopolitics is tendentially always the transformation of first nature by second nature into something else: taking care of human nature imperceptibly becomes improving it, whether in a racist or an

<sup>28</sup> Guy Debord, *La Société du Spectacle* [1967], Paris 1992, pp. 26, 149–64.

<sup>29</sup> Mel Bochner and Robert Smithson, 'The Domain of the Great Bear' [1966], in Smithson, *Collected Writings*, p. 33.

<sup>30</sup> See in particular Michel Foucault, 'Society Must Be Defended'. *Lectures at the Collège de France 1975–1976*, New York 2003.

apparently more benign ideological context. It thus would seem that biopolitics involves a typically modern, progressive, linear approach to history: measures are taken to ensure a healthier and more productive—and more manageable—population in the future. Yet the temporality of biopolitics can also bite its tail, in the form of dreamlike scenarios of a return to lost greatness.

Nietzsche's *Übermensch* was conceived as such a return. For Nietzsche, Darwin's notion of natural selection was too deterministic: (human) nature is far more flexible and amenable to artificial moulding. While modern society had created masses of paupers and proletarians, leveling hierarchies and eroding culture, the eternal return would ultimately lead to a reversal of this process, creating a new breed of sovereign aesthetes beyond Christian morality. However, nature may not work quickly enough, and Nietzsche entertained the fantasy of an elite that takes control of this eternal return. Disgusted by the second nature of historicist culture, by the oppression of life by a mania for the historical and the copying of the forms of ancient and non-Western cultures, Nietzsche stated that the *Übermensch*—himself an artificial creation—would act as 'a hothouse for strange and choice plants'.<sup>31</sup> With this phrase he seems to come close to Huysmans, yet his vision of an artificial, unnatural nature is to an extent renaturalized by his recourse to tried and trusted models, even if these were not to be slavishly copied. As the result of an active intervention in the eternal circle, the *Übermensch* was to be a second or third coming of the Renaissance aristocrat and the antique Athenian, blissfully devoid of Christian morality.

The product of a breeding programme, Nietzsche's overman is effectively a fictitious form of third nature. Both Idealist and—to a lesser degree—Marxist thinkers were reluctant to reflect on the transformation of first nature by developments in science and technology. Second nature is not only a superstructure imposed on first nature; it intervenes in it to generate the third nature of unnatural history. If second nature is becoming more and more 'dematerialized' due to information technology, leading to neo-Idealist visions of a clean and dematerialized capitalism—witness

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<sup>31</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Nachgelassene Fragmente. Herbst 1887 bis März 1888*, in Nietzsche, *Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 8, part 2, Berlin 1972, p. 90 [fragment 153]. While Nietzsche frequently used the term *Kultur* in the now dominant sense, to refer to a society and its achievements (as in 'Renaissance culture'), passages such as this remind us that the Latin *cultura* referred first and foremost to agriculture and horticulture.

the recent craze for companies to set up shop in *Second Life*, the much-hyped and tellingly named online community—the rise of third nature is a stark reminder of the phantasmal character of such claims.<sup>32</sup> In principle, third nature is as old as human intervention in first nature, but it has only become truly visible and thinkable with modern developments in science and technology—generating fantasies of an end to disease and even a triumph over mortality, while also leading to fears of ecocide. For the third nature of ecological collapse is the obverse of that of biopolitical improvement. Needless to say, its effects will not be fatal for those economic and genetic overmen who can afford the latest technology to survive the Katrinas of the new nature.

The interrelationship between biopolitics and climate change had already been indicated, in a phantasmagorical register, by Charles Fourier in the early nineteenth century. Convinced that he had found ‘laws of attraction’ in the psychological realm to match those of Newton in the physical world, Fourier proceeded to propose a reform of society in accordance with these laws—with human nature. The association of free human beings in the Phalanstery would not only result in humanity attaining its true destiny, but also in changes in the natural environment. Fourier’s famous pronouncement that the ocean would be turned into lemonade is indicative of his extreme faith in the transformability of nature, provided human society is capable of mending its ways. In a stunning text on the ‘material deterioration of the planet’, he averred that the noticeable cooling of the planet—there was indeed a series of extremely cold years in the early nineteenth century—was in apparent contrast with the expected warming of the climate due to industrial pollution.<sup>33</sup> This strange, illogical course taken by nature could only be explained by the planet’s reaction to the sick and unnatural social order that prevailed: a social evolution in the Fourierist direction, by contrast, would effectively

<sup>32</sup> In a different use of the term ‘third nature’, McKenzie Wark in 2001 defined it as ‘the transformation of both nature and second nature into an information landscape capable of controlling the process of transformation of nature into second nature’ (*Spatial Discussions*, available at [www.nettime.org](http://www.nettime.org)). In restricting ‘second nature’ to material culture, and using ‘third nature’ to denote information technology, Wark seems to assent to quasi-Idealist 1990s’ constructions of the ‘New Economy’. I see no reason to distinguish information technology as such from second nature, though it certainly is a crucial factor in the transformation of first and second nature into third nature.

<sup>33</sup> Charles Fourier’s ‘Détérioration matérielle de la planète’, in René Schérer, ed., *L’Écosophie de Charles Fourier. Deux textes inédits*, Paris 2001, pp. 31–125.

turn the world into a land of plenty. Grandville's famous lampoon of Fourier's utopia in a drawing depicting roasted birds falling from the sky does cruel justice to this aspect of Fourier's writing. But his adoption of folk-utopian motifs also gives great force to his vision, and underlines the benefits of radical change. In stark contrast to Gore or Diamond, Fourier argued that the entire social system needed to be changed for the planet to survive.

### *The biopolitical spectacle*

Foucault was curtly dismissive of the suggestion that modern society may be a 'society of the spectacle', refusing even to mention Debord's name. Rather, Foucault insisted that 'we are much less Greeks than we believe. We are neither in the amphitheatre, nor on the stage, but in the panoptic machine, invested by its effects of power, which we bring to ourselves since we are part of its mechanism.'<sup>34</sup> In his final years, the notion of biopolitics came to complement and in part to displace the notion of discipline, the biopolitical administration of life now appearing as fundamental to both 'democratic' and 'totalitarian' forms of government, a subtler as well as more radical and pervasive form of power. But Foucault, who identified the notion of spectacle with the public tortures and executions of the Ancien Régime, was hardly a discerning critic of the Debordian conception of the spectacle, based as it is on the reified representation of social relations in commodities. In the end, do not the biopolitical procedures theorized by Foucault end up absorbed by, and transformed into, spectacle? Just as forms of biopolitics have spectacular value—as in *Kraft durch Freude*, for instance—the spectacle increasingly becomes biopolitical, as exemplified by the rise of plastic surgery.

Referring to Foucault's late works, Bruno Latour remarked that modern society cannot be overthrown because it has been designed not to be; while this is strictly speaking little more than a sophism, as if the designers' intentions guaranteed success, the odds are not exactly favourable.<sup>35</sup> Any break will have to be forced from small cracks within the existing order, small mutations in its repetitious progress. Perhaps in this situation the grotesque figure of Mickey Cuvier, protagonist in a group of installations by the artist Mark Dion, can serve as a dysfunctional model

<sup>34</sup> Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir. Naissance de la prison*, Paris 1975, p. 253.

<sup>35</sup> Bruno Latour, 'Let the Dead (Revolutionaries) Bury the Dead' (2006), available at [www.bruno-latour.fr](http://www.bruno-latour.fr).



of sorts. A blend of Mickey Mouse and the great taxonomist Georges Cuvier, who was involved in the early reconstruction and classification of extinct animals shortly after 1800, this character—represented by a Mickey Mouse doll—presides over various study-like arrangements, including one called *The Taxonomy of Non-Endangered Species* (1990), with a shelf of preserve jars containing pop mutants like Pink Panther, Woody Woodpecker and Big Bird. Cuvier exploded the symbolic order of his day by means of a rigid taxonomy of extinct creatures, even while denying the evolution of species; Disney was the creator of a group of new artificial species. In melding the two in the figure of Mickey Cuvier, Dion has created an unnatural hybrid that is more than the sum of its parts, suggesting the need to question any ideologization of first, second and third nature as immutable fate.

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JANE BENNETT

## EDIBLE MATTER

DO THE WAYS in which we conceive of politics sufficiently acknowledge the force of 'things'?<sup>1</sup> Does our thinking about political agency—about what can make things happen in the public arena—take adequate account of material agency? The traditional approach is exemplified by Leon Kass, appointed by George W. Bush in 2001 to the President's Council on Bioethics and its one-time chair. He argues in *The Hungry Soul: Eating and the Perfecting of Our Nature* that this everyday activity reveals humanity's place at the top of the hierarchy of being and our rightful mastery over things. According to Kass, 'in eating, we do not become the something that we eat; rather the edible gets assimilated to what we are . . . the edible object is thoroughly transformed by and re-formed into the eater.'<sup>2</sup>

This conquest model of consumption disregards the effectivity of not only animal bodies, but also the 'bodies' of vegetables, minerals, and pharmaceutical, bacterial or viral agents. It presents nonhuman matter as merely the environment for or the means to human action. But does there not exist, as the notion of a viral agent suggests, a form of agentic capacity not restricted to the human actor, a potentiality within materiality per se? This material agency would include the negative power to resist or obstruct human projects, but it would also entail the active power to exert forces and create effects.

In this essay, I seek to bring to the fore this vital power as it exists within nonhuman 'actants'.<sup>3</sup> Bruno Latour defines an actant as 'something that acts or to which activity is granted by others. It implies no special motivation of human individual actors, nor of humans in general.'<sup>4</sup> Proceeding from this definition, I will horizontalize the relations between humans, biota and abiota—presenting all of them as actors vying for efficacy. However, each of these can express its agentic capacity only within an

assemblage congenial to it—only, that is, within a specific configuration of other actants (each itself an effect of the interactions between the multiple actants internal to it). Agency is then a force distributed across multiple, overlapping bodies, disseminated in degrees—rather than the capacity of a unitary subject of consciousness.

Edible material is an agent inside and alongside intention-forming, morality-(dis)obeying, language-using, reflexivity-wielding, culture-making human beings. Food is an active inducer-producer of salient, public effects, rather than a passive resource at the disposal of consumers. The case for food as a co-participant in our world, as possessing an agentic capacity irreducible to (though rarely divorced from) human agency, has two prongs. The first seeks support in scientific studies of the effects of dietary fat on the moods and cognitive dispositions of humans, not only on the thickness of their flesh. The second revisits the robust discussions around the moral and political efficacy of diet in the nineteenth century. Here I will focus on motifs from the work of Friedrich Nietzsche and Henry Thoreau, where eating becomes a series of mutual transformations in which the border between inside and outside becomes blurred. My meal is and is not mine; you are and are not what you eat. Human and nonhuman bodies re-corporealize in response to each other; both exercise formative power and also offer themselves as matter to be acted upon. Eating, then, reveals not only the interdependence of humans and edible matter, but also a capacity to effect social change inherent in human and nonhuman bodies alike. I conclude by asking whether an enhanced alertness to material agency might help us to reimagine what materiality is—to move it away from the image of inert, brute matter.

### *What is materiality?*

If the eaten is to become 'food', it must be digestible to a formerly foreign body. Likewise, if the eater is to be nourished, it must accommodate itself to a formerly foreign body. Both, then, have to have been mutable,

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<sup>1</sup> Thanks to Anders Berg-Sorensen, John Buell, Bill Connolly, Jonathan Goldberg, Jake Greear, Hadley Leach, Jennifer Lin, Patchen Markell, Noortje Marres, Nicholas Tampio and Lars Tønder for their contributions to this essay.

<sup>2</sup> Leon Kass, *The Hungry Soul*, Chicago 1994, pp. 25–6.

<sup>3</sup> By 'nonhumans' I do not mean that which is untouched by or utterly unrelated to humans, but rather an independent dimension of things, an aspect irreducible to what people invest or insert into them.

<sup>4</sup> Bruno Latour, 'On actor-network theory. a few clarifications' (1998), available at [www.nettime.org](http://www.nettime.org). See also Latour, *The Politics of Nature*, Cambridge, MA 2004, p. 75.

to have always been a materiality that is hustle and flow as well as sedimentation and substance. The rhetorical thrust of the noun 'matter' and the adjective 'material' is precisely the opposite: to denote *stable stuff*. Ben Anderson and Divya Tolia-Kelly note that there are two dominant figurations of materiality, both of which associate it with stability or grounding: 'The first is the familiar realist equation between matter and unmediated, static, physicality' and 'the second is the use of "the material", or "material conditions", to refer to an ostensive social structure that over-determines "the cultural"'.<sup>5</sup>

Materiality does, of course, sometimes act as solid ground and recalcitrant structure. But edible materiality discloses what Deleuze calls a 'vagabond materiality'.<sup>6</sup> For him metal and metallurgy reveal the nomadism of what has traditionally been conceived as matter awaiting form. Playing on the notion of metal as a 'conductor' of electricity, he describes how metal 'conducts' materiality through a series of self-transformations—not a sequential movement from one fixed point to another, but a tumbling of continuous variations with fuzzy borders. Metals do not settle forever into one determinate state; alloys bleed into each other. Their efficacy does not depend only on periods of stability: a certain 'incorporeality' is not incompatible with the ability to act or to produce powerful effects.

Surveying its various incarnations, Maud Ellman illustrates how food exemplifies this becoming over being:

its disintegration in the stomach, its assimilation in the blood, its diaphoresis in the epidermis, its metempsychosis in the large intestine; its viscosity in okra, gumbo, oysters, its elasticity in jellies, its deliquescence in blanchmanges; its tumescence in the throats of serpents, its slow erosion in the bellies of sharks; its odysseys through pastures, orchards, wheat-fields, stock-yards, supermarkets, kitchens, pig troughs, rubbish dumps, disposals; the industries of sowing, hunting, cooking, mulling, processing and canning it, the wizardry of its mutations, ballooning in bread, subsiding in soufflés; raw and cooked, solid and melting, vegetable and mineral, fish, flesh and fowl, encompassing the whole compendium of living substance.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Ben Anderson and Divya Tolia-Kelly, 'Matter(s) in social and cultural geography', *Geoforum*, vol. 35, no. 6 (November 2004), pp. 669–70.

<sup>6</sup> Gilles Deleuze, 'Metal, metallurgy, music, Husserl, Simondon', delivered in Vincennes, 27 February 1979, available at [www.webdeleuze.com](http://www.webdeleuze.com).

<sup>7</sup> Maud Ellman, *The Hunger Artists: Starving, Writing and Imprisonment*, Cambridge, MA 1993, cited in Terry Eagleton, 'Edible Ecriture', in Sian Griffiths and Jennifer Wallace, eds, *Consuming Passions: Food in the Age of Anxiety*, Manchester 1998, p. 207.

Deleuze claims that metallurgy exposes the 'vague essence' of materiality to be 'continuous variation' and 'continuous development of form'.<sup>8</sup> Food too reveals materiality's instability, vagrancy, activeness.

### *Effects and agents*

In 1917, the English physiologist W. M. Bayliss wrote that 'it may be taken for granted that everyone is sincerely desirous of avoiding unnecessary consumption of food'.<sup>9</sup> However, 70 per cent of Americans surveyed in a 2000 Roper Report said that they ate 'pretty much whatever they want.' That means, on an average day, 52 teaspoons of sugar and corn sweeteners, over half a pound of meat, and a fifth of a pound of butter and oils. Overall, what Americans 'want' is to eat between 500 and 800 more calories a day than they did fifty years ago.<sup>10</sup> That would explain why their bodies are larger and heavier than ever before. Here we stumble upon a banal instance of what Michel Foucault might have called the 'productive power' of food: the generation of new human tissue.

That food can make people fatter is a fact so ordinary and obvious that it is difficult to perceive it as an example of food's agentic capacity. The case becomes stronger when we learn of hitherto unrecognized powers of dietary fat, in particular its ability to alter not just bodies but minds. Several recent studies suggest that omega-3 fatty acids, a kind of fat prevalent in certain fish, can make disruptive prisoners less violent, inattentive schoolchildren more focused and bipolar persons less depressed. A widely cited 2002 'double-blind, placebo-controlled, randomized trial of nutritional supplements on 231 young adult prisoners, comparing disciplinary offences before and during supplementation' shows a 35 per cent reduction of offences among British prisoners given omega-3 fatty acids.<sup>11</sup> A similarly designed study of fatty acids given to children with 'difficulties in learning, behaviour and psychosocial adjustment'

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<sup>8</sup> Deleuze, 'Metal, metallurgy'.

<sup>9</sup> W. M. Bayliss, *The Physiology of Food and Economy in Diet*, London 1917, p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> Since 1950, the consumption of sweeteners has increased by 39 per cent, red meat by 7 lb and poultry by 46 lb per year, and added fats by 67 per cent. All statistics taken from the United States Department of Agriculture's *Agriculture Fact Book: 2001–2002*, 'Profiling Food Consumption in America'. 'Consumption' refers to what is used up of the aggregate food supply; because of 'spoilage, plate waste, and . . . other losses', amounts are greater than the actual amount of food ingested.

<sup>11</sup> C. Bernard Gesch et al., 'Influence of supplementary vitamins, minerals and essential fatty acids on the antisocial behaviour of young adult prisoners', *British Journal of Psychiatry*, vol. 181, no. 1 (July 2002), pp. 22–8.

finds 'significant improvement' in reading, spelling and conduct.<sup>12</sup> Meanwhile, the '60-fold variation across countries in the annual prevalence of major depression is strongly inversely correlated with national fish consumption . . . For bipolar affective disorder . . . prevalence rates rise precipitously below an apparent annual fish intake threshold of approximately 75 lb per person, with prevalence rates of . . . 0.04 per cent in Taiwan (81.6 lb per person) and 6.5 per cent in Germany (27.6 lb per person).' Americans in 2000 ate about 15 lb per person.<sup>13</sup>

Results such as these are always subject to further research and to various interpretations. They do support the idea that lipids have the power not just to increase human flesh but also to induce human moods, modes of sociality and states of mind. But I do not imagine that this effectivity is a mechanical causality, nor that we will someday arrive at a nutritional science which demonstrates certain quantifiable cognitive or behavioural enhancements to be the invariant effects of specific fats. It is more likely that an emergent causality is at work: particular fats, acting in different ways in different bodies and with different intensities, even within the same body at different times, may produce patterns of effects but not in ways that are fully predictable—for a small change in the assemblage may issue in a significant disruption of the pattern. The agentic assemblage in which persons and fats are participants ought to be figured as a nonlinear system:

In a linear system, the ultimate effect of the combined action of two different causes is merely the [addition] . . . of the effects of each cause taken individually. But in a nonlinear system, adding a small cause to one that is already present can induce dramatic effects that have no common measure of the amplitude of the cause.<sup>14</sup>

In nonlinear assemblages, 'effects' resonate with and against their 'causes' such that the impact of any added element (omega-3 fatty acid) or set of elements (high fish diet) cannot be grasped at a glance. Instead, their agency

<sup>12</sup> Alexandra Richardson and Paul Montgomery, 'The Oxford-Durham Study: A randomized, controlled trial of dietary supplementation with fatty acids in children with Developmental Coordination Disorder,' *Pediatrics*, vol. 115, no. 5 (May 2005), pp. 1360–6.

<sup>13</sup> Brian Hallahan and Malcolm Garland, 'Essential fatty acids and mental health', *British Journal of Psychiatry*, vol. 186, no. 4 (April 2005), pp. 275–7.

<sup>14</sup> Grégoire Nicolis and Ilya Prigogine, *Exploring Complexity*, New York 1989, p. 59, cited in Manuel DeLanda, *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy*, London 2002, p. 131.

is 'slowly brought to light as the assemblage stabilizes itself through the mutual accommodation of its heterogeneous components.'<sup>15</sup>

Within these assemblages, particular elements can be so contingently well-positioned that they can significantly alter the direction or function of the assemblage; Deleuze and Guattari term these particularly efficacious elements 'operators'. They give the example of a piece of grass used by a finch both to make a nest and find a mate. The grass stem 'acts as a component of passage between the territorial assemblage and the courtship assemblage . . . It is an operator, a vector. It is an *assemblage converter*.'<sup>16</sup> Food can be what Michel Serres calls a 'thermal exciter': it does not effect a revolutionary transformation in the assemblage it enters, instead making it 'change state differentially. It inclines it. It makes the equilibrium of the energetic distribution fluctuate . . . It irritates it. It inflames it. Often this inclination has no effect. But it can produce gigantic ones by chain reactions or reproduction.'<sup>17</sup>

What counts as an actor is no longer the individual but actants-in-assemblages. In the case of fat, for instance, we need to bear in mind not only larger humans and their economic-cultural prostheses (agribusiness, snack food vending machines, serving sizes, microwave ovens, bariatric surgery) but also the strivings and trajectories of the fats themselves, as they vie with—or more indirectly, weaken or strengthen—human wills, practices, habits and ideas.

### *Flatulent vegetables*

Most evidence of the active power of foodstuffs comes by way of the physical or biological sciences, as in the studies cited above. The social sciences and humanities, when they take up the question of food, mainly focus on human acts in, for example, the rhetoric of culinary self-expression or the socio-cultural rituals and practices through which meaningful food objects are produced, or the aesthetic-commercial techniques through which desire for a new food product is induced. With the exception of the cookbook author or restaurant reviewer who describes the colour, texture and aroma of ingredients, food writing seldom attends

<sup>15</sup> DeLanda, *Intensive Science*, p. 144.

<sup>16</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Minneapolis 1987, pp. 324–5.

<sup>17</sup> Michel Serres, *Parasite* [1980], Minneapolis 2007, p. 191.



to the force of materiality. As David Goodman puts it in his critique of agro-food studies in sociology, conceptualizations of food's materiality as a 'real and active, lively presence' are all too rare.<sup>18</sup>

In the nineteenth century, however, certain philosophers posited that food is capable of producing significant alterations in the dispositions of individuals and even nations. Nietzsche, for example—without the benefit of experiments of the randomized, double-blind sort—claimed that psychological, cognitive, aesthetic and moral complexions were altered by what was ingested: 'an incorrect diet (the alcoholism of the Middle Ages; the absurdity of the vegetarians)' is one source of 'the deep depression, the leaden exhaustion, the black melancholy of the physiologically inhibited'.<sup>19</sup>

Nietzsche attended to the material agency proper to not only alcohol and other drugs, but food. This includes the capacity to induce what one might call a corporeal spirituality. Zarathustra proclaims, 'My virile food taketh effect, my strong and savoury sayings: and verily, I did not nourish them with flatulent vegetables! But with warrior-food, with conqueror-food: new desires did I awaken.'<sup>20</sup> However 'warrior food' (raw meat?) alone does not make a warrior. Rather, the effectivity of any particular food depends upon the specific temper of the body into which it enters. Nietzsche makes this point in his discussion of a popular diet book of his day, Luigi Cornaro's *La Vita Sobria*. Cornaro, born in 1464, lived to 102 by eating only 12 ounces of solid food ('bread, the yolk of an egg, a little meat, and some soup') and 14 ounces of wine a day ('waters, in whatever way they may be doctored or prepared, have not the virtue of wine, and fail to relieve me').<sup>21</sup> Nietzsche complains that 'a scholar of *our* day, with his rapid consumption of nervous energy, would kill himself with Cornaro's regimen.'<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> David Goodman, 'Ontology Matters: The Relational Materiality of Nature and Agro-Food Studies', *Sociologia Ruralis*, vol. 41, no. 2 (April 2001), p. 183.

<sup>19</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals/Ecce Homo*, New York 1969, p. 130.

<sup>20</sup> Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, New York 1954, p. 311.

<sup>21</sup> Luigi Cornaro, *Art of Living Long* [1915], Milwaukee 1998, pp. 55, 94.

<sup>22</sup> Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, London and New York 1983, p. 47. Nietzsche seems not to have read Cornaro carefully enough: 'I was compelled to be extremely careful with regard to the quality and quantity of my food and drink. However those persons who are blessed with strong constitutions may make use of many other kinds and qualities of food and drink, and partake of them in greater quantities, than I do'. Cornaro, *Art of Living Long*, p. 97.

The effectivity of a foodstuff varies from body to body, but what is even more interesting about Nietzsche's discussion of Cornaro is his suggestion that the effectivity of the 'same' food in the 'same' body will vary over time as actants enter and leave the scene. Nietzsche makes a similar point when he writes that 'warrior food', if it is to produce warriors, must join forces with a whole host of other actants. He again gestures towards a kind of assemblage, rather than the individual, as the real locus of agency in his discussion of anti-Semitism's hold on Bismarck's Germany, 'connected with the undeniable and palpable stagnation of the German spirit; and the cause of that I seek in a too exclusive diet of newspapers, politics, beer and Wagnerian music'.<sup>23</sup>

A material foodstuff—beer—comes alive to its powers when in the presence of cultural artefacts: broadsheets, politics, opera. These latter are what Donna Haraway would call 'material-semiotic actors', hybrids of sounds, thought, symbols, hopes, affects and physical matter.<sup>24</sup> Any science of diet, then, would have to take account not only of foods acting in conjunction with other materialities such as digestive liquids or micro-organisms, but also with the not-quite materialities of perception, belief, memory, meaning. Still, Nietzsche warns against exaggerating the force of such 'higher' things: 'nutrition, place, climate . . . are inconceivably more important than everything one has taken to be important so far: "God", "soul", "virtue", "sin", "beyond", "truth", "eternal life".'<sup>25</sup>

Much like Russian *matryoshki* dolls, assemblages contain a sequence of ever smaller ones—functioning collectivities of actants within a series of larger, more complex assemblages. But there is also a sense in which Nietzsche continues to imagine the assemblage of consumption as issuing in predictable, rather than emergent, outcomes—whose predictability increases as one's knowledge of the system becomes more detailed, up-to-the-minute and comprehensive. Perhaps this supposition of a reliable mechanism is a necessary illusion, required if one is to pursue a deliberate regime of consumption, a plan of action in which one part of the body (the will?) issues orders to others (limbs, mouth, eyes, nose) about what and how much it ought to take in.

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<sup>23</sup> Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, pp. 158–9.

<sup>24</sup> Donna Haraway, *Modest\_Witness@Second\_Millennium.FemaleMan-Meets-OncoMouse*, London and New York 1997, p. 2.

<sup>25</sup> Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, p. 256.

Reflecting on the material components of an ethical-existential disposition, Nietzsche began to craft a programme of artful eating. On the other side of the Atlantic, Henry Thoreau engaged in his own programme of consumption, one designed to induce a different set of effects. Both experimentalists sought to benefit in mind and body from the vital, active powers of food. Nietzsche rejected vegetables because of their role in ascetic practices associated with *ressentiment*. Thoreau shared his sense of a vegetal agency but located it within a different assemblage, which produced a different effect, at least on his body: a wakeful, creative, nonconformist sensibility.

While walking home one night, Thoreau catches a 'glimpse of a woodchuck stealing across my path, and I felt a strange thrill of savage delight, and was strongly tempted to seize and devour him raw; not that I was hungry then, except for that wildness which he represented.'<sup>26</sup> But then he stops to wonder: will its vitality really become his? After years of consuming animal bodies, he finally asks just how eating works. Just what transpires when these bodies mix with mine?<sup>27</sup> Thoreau ultimately concludes that 'devouring' wild flesh does not in fact result in his own vitalization, but in the mortification—the rotting—of his imagination.

With every year, meat becomes more and more viscerally unappealing to Thoreau. Eventually, he stops consuming 'animal food' (and tea and coffee) altogether, finding 'something essentially unclean' about it. The irresistible wildness of a lively woodchuck had turned into the repellent uncleanness of its corpse. He calls this a 'practical objection'—meat oozes and drips, whereas 'a little bread or a few potatoes would have done as well, with less trouble and filth.'<sup>28</sup> But more than housekeeping is at stake here. Meat, he declares, is 'not agreeable to my imagination . . . I believe that every man who has ever been earnest to preserve his higher or poetic faculties in the best condition has been particularly inclined to abstain from animal food . . . It may be vain to ask why the imagination will not be reconciled to flesh and fat. I am satisfied that it is not.'

<sup>26</sup> Henry Thoreau, *Walden and Resistance to Civil Government*, New York 1992, p. 140.

<sup>27</sup> Walt Whitman engages in a similar consideration in *Leaves of Grass*, 'Song of Myself', lines 389–90: 'Who goes there? hankering, gross, mystical, nude, / How is it that I extract strength from the beef I eat?'

<sup>28</sup> 'Most men would feel shame if caught preparing with their own hands' the bloody meat dinner that is 'everyday prepared for them by others'—that is, by women. Thoreau, *Walden*, pp. 143–4.

Thoreau resists ingesting the viscous slime of decaying animal bodies, and seeks an alternative that can leaven his flesh and refine his imagination. He is 'thrilled' to find that 'some berries which I had eaten on the hill-side had fed my genius.'<sup>29</sup>

Thoreau allows the untamed vitality of things, including the foods he eats, to come to the fore in a way that renders him finer, leaner and cleaner. He enters into and helps maintain an assemblage—a shimmering web of solid and wispy materialities. But if nonhumans 'have' agentic capacity, its actualization and strength is affected by the character of human engagements with materiality. Thoreau had a sense of this from his regular supper of huckleberries and blueberries: 'The fruits do not yield their true flavour to the purchaser of them, nor to him who raises them for the market . . . It is a vulgar error to suppose that you have tasted huckleberries who never plucked them . . . The ambrosial and essential part of the fruit is lost with the bloom which is rubbed off in the market cart, and they become mere provender.'<sup>30</sup> In Thoreau's account, then, both nonhumans (berries, meat) and humans (Thoreau, berry-sellers) exhibit agentic force.

### *How food matters*

Against the dissipating effects of food commodification, the Slow Food Movement stands out as a collective example of artful consumption. Founded in Italy in 1986, this international network contests the McDonaldization, environmental unsustainability and petroleum intensity of a globalized system of food production, marketing and distribution. According to its manifesto:

Slow Food is dedicated to stewardship of the land and ecologically sound food production; to the revival of the kitchen and the table as centres of pleasure, culture and community; to the invigoration and proliferation of regional, seasonal culinary traditions; to the creation of a collaborative, ecologically-oriented and virtuous globalization, and to living a slower and more harmonious rhythm of life.<sup>31</sup>

What is distinctive about Slow Food, and what might enable it to have an impact, is its dual invocation of environmental and gastronomical

<sup>29</sup> Thoreau, *Walden*, pp. 144–6.

<sup>30</sup> Thoreau, *Walden*, pp. 116–17.

<sup>31</sup> See [www.slowfoodusa.org](http://www.slowfoodusa.org).

concerns. It simultaneously advocates ecological sustainability, cultural specificity, nutritional economy, aesthetic pleasure and the skills needed to make meals from scratch. In grouping these interests together and forming this particular assemblage, Slow Food just might have a chance to stir an American public that environmentalism alone was not quite able to activate, especially in a political setting where wasteful and unhealthy consumption is encouraged at the highest levels of policy.

The Slow Food programme involves taking the time not only to prepare and savour food, but also to reflect upon the economic, labour, agricultural and transportation events preceding its arrival to the market, consonant with a commodity chain approach that chronicles the 'life-history' of a food product and traces 'the links that connect people and places at different points along the chain.'<sup>32</sup> The strength of this method resides in its ability to give consumers better insight into just what goes into their mouths: not only in terms of ingredients such as pesticides, animal hormones, fats, sugars, vitamins, minerals, etc, but also the exploitation of food workers, and the greed of agribusiness and its agents in Congress.<sup>33</sup> But its weakness may be its anthropocentric allegiances, its tendency, which it shares with Kass, to figure food as merely a resource or means.

If politics, in its broadest definition, consists in those activities pursued on behalf of the public, then we are left with the thorny questions of what counts as a public and what it would mean to act on its behalf. Here it is useful to return to the idea of emergent causality, which is implicit in John Dewey's claim that the public and its interests do not

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<sup>32</sup> Peter Jackson, 'Manufacturing meaning along the food commodity chain', Birkbeck Cultures of Consumption project, 2003. An example is Michael Pollan, *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals*, New York, 2006. It gives a genealogy of four American meals—one from McDonald's, one from items bought at a 'Whole Foods' supermarket, one whose ingredients came from a small, self-sustaining farm, and one from what the author had hunted or gathered.

<sup>33</sup> Good examples include Cheri Lucas Jennings's and Bruce Jennings's exposé of the poverty wages and poisonous working conditions embedded in the shiny red, wormless supermarket apple and Greg Critser's account of the link between agribusiness interests, subsidized corn production, high-fructose corn syrup and obesity. See Cheri Lucas Jennings and Bruce Jennings, 'Green Fields/Brown Skin: Posting as a Sign of Recognition', in Jane Bennett and William Chaloupka, eds, *In the Nature of Things: Language, Politics and the Environment*, Minnesota 1993; Greg Critser, *Fat Land: How Americans Became the Fattest People in the World*, Boston 2003.

pre-exist the real-time events that call them into being. How is it that sometimes scattered, unrelated individuals are aroused to join forces and engender a public, while at other times they are content to remain in private or in apolitical forms of association?<sup>34</sup> The crystallization of a public requires a catalyst, which Dewey identifies as a dynamic event that causes harm.<sup>35</sup> Since such a problem is itself a contingency, its effect—a public—is also a temporal assemblage, always in the process of forming and dissolving. As he puts it, ‘the ramifications of the issues before the public are so wide and intricate . . . the details are so many and so shifting, that the public cannot for any length of time identify and hold itself. It is not that there is no public . . . there are too many publics, for conjoint actions’ have multitudinous consequences ‘and each one of them crosses the others and generates its own group of persons especially affected’.<sup>36</sup>

Taking a cue from Dewey’s pragmatic focus on consequences rather than authorial intentions, I have tried to show that the public consists of more than ‘persons’ and that the locus of political agency is a (mortal) assemblage of humans *and* nonhumans. In *Art as Experience*, Dewey uses the figure of skin to draw readers’ attention to the interconnections between humans and other materialities. He gestures towards the idea of an agentic assemblage:

The epidermis is only in the most superficial way an indication of where an organism ends and its environment begins. There are things inside the body that are foreign to it, and there are things outside of it that belong to it *de jure* if not *de facto*; that must, that is, be taken possession of if life is to continue. On the lower scale, air and food materials are such things; on the higher, tools, whether the pen of the writer or the anvil of the blacksmith, utensils and furnishings, property, friends and institutions—all the supports

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<sup>34</sup> As Noortje Marres rightly notes, for Dewey (and also Walter Lippmann), the ‘public is precisely *not* a social community . . . [T]hose who are jointly implicated in the issue *must organize* a community. What the members of the public share is that they are all affected . . . but they do not already belong to the same community.’ Noortje Marres, ‘Issues Spark a Public into Being: A key but often forgotten point of the Lippmann–Dewey debate’, in Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel, eds, *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy*, Cambridge, MA 2005, p. 214.

<sup>35</sup> A public ‘consists of all those who are affected by the indirect consequences of transactions to such an extent that it is deemed necessary to have those consequences systematically cared for.’ John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, New York 1927, p. 16.

<sup>36</sup> Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, p. 137.

and sustenances without which a civilized life cannot be. The need that is manifest in the urgent impulses that demand completion through what the environment—and it alone—can supply, is a dynamic acknowledgment of this dependence of the self for wholeness upon its surroundings.<sup>37</sup>

This picture of food, however, as a tool to 'be taken possession of', perpetuates the notion of nonhuman materiality as essentially passive stuff—on one side of an ontological divide between life and matter. In contrast, I have construed food as itself an actant within an agentic assemblage that includes among its members my metabolism, cognition and moral sensibility. My goal has been to uncover what modern thought—in its tireless quest to extricate humans from the order of nature and to isolate what is unique about our capacities—has worked so hard to obscure: the presence of the 'active principle' in matter.

What would happen if movements like Slow Food incorporated a greater sense of the active vitality of foodstuffs? If an image of inert matter helps to animate aggressively wasteful and planet-endangering consumption, then a materiality experienced as a lively force could animate a more ecologically sustainable public. Human intentionality is surely an essential element of the public that is emerging around the issues of obesity, public health and food security, but it is not the only or even the key operator in it. Food—as a self-altering, dissipative materiality—is also a player. It enters into what we become. It is one of the many agencies operative when we engage in the questions of what to eat, how to get it, and when to stop.

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<sup>37</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, New York 1934, p. 59.

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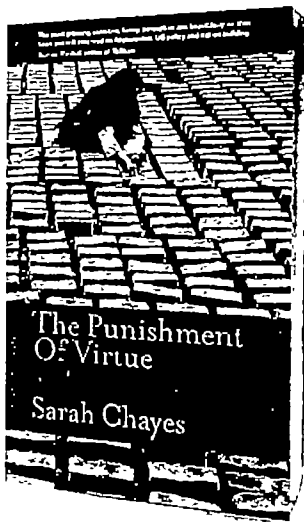
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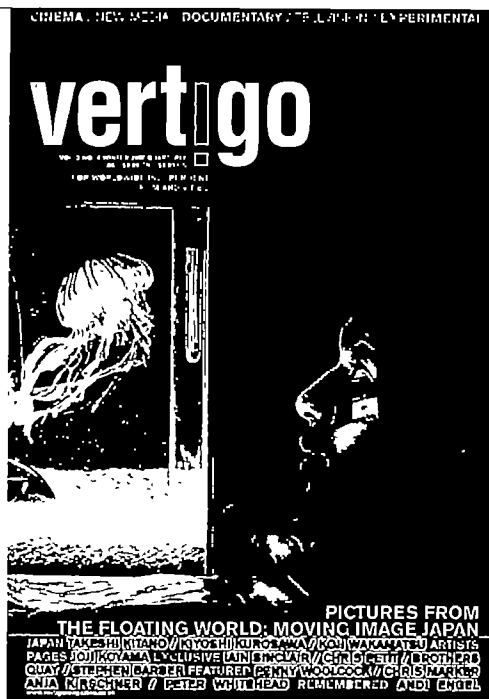
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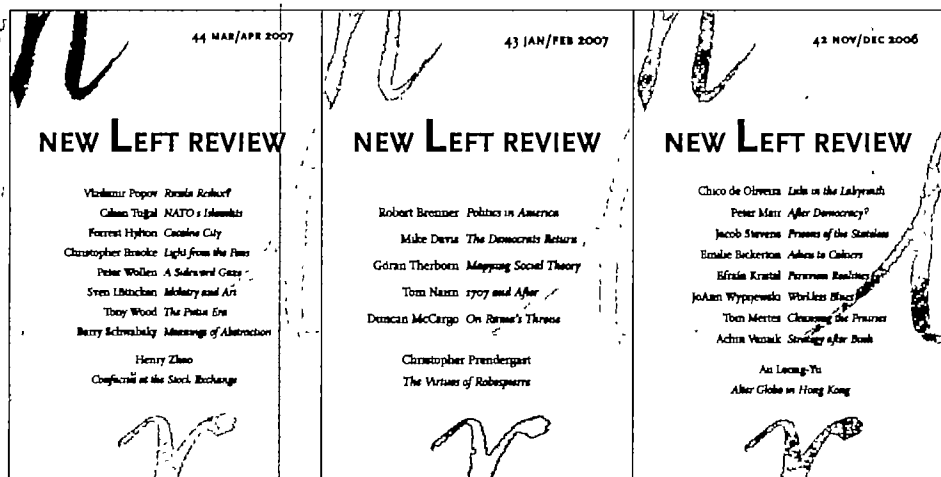
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